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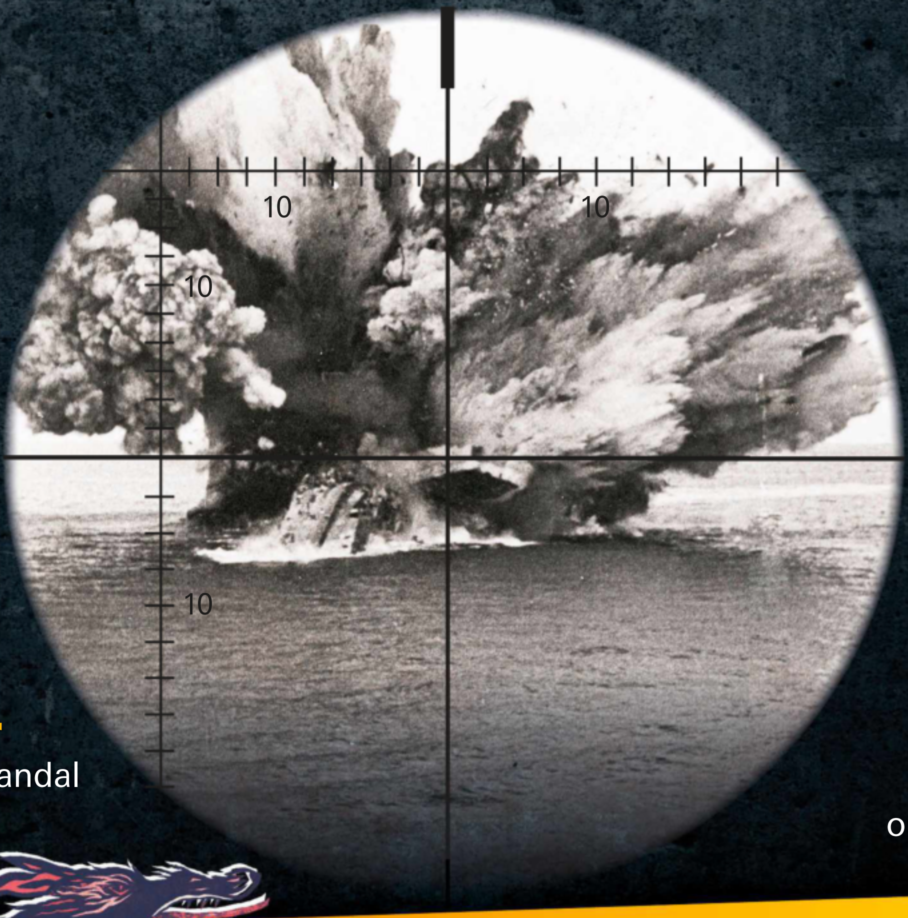
MARVELLOUS MEDIEVAL MEDICINE
Why their curious cures were better than you think

HISTORY MAGAZINE

SPECIAL INTEREST MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR
November 2025 / **www.historyextra.com**

TERROR IN THE DEEP

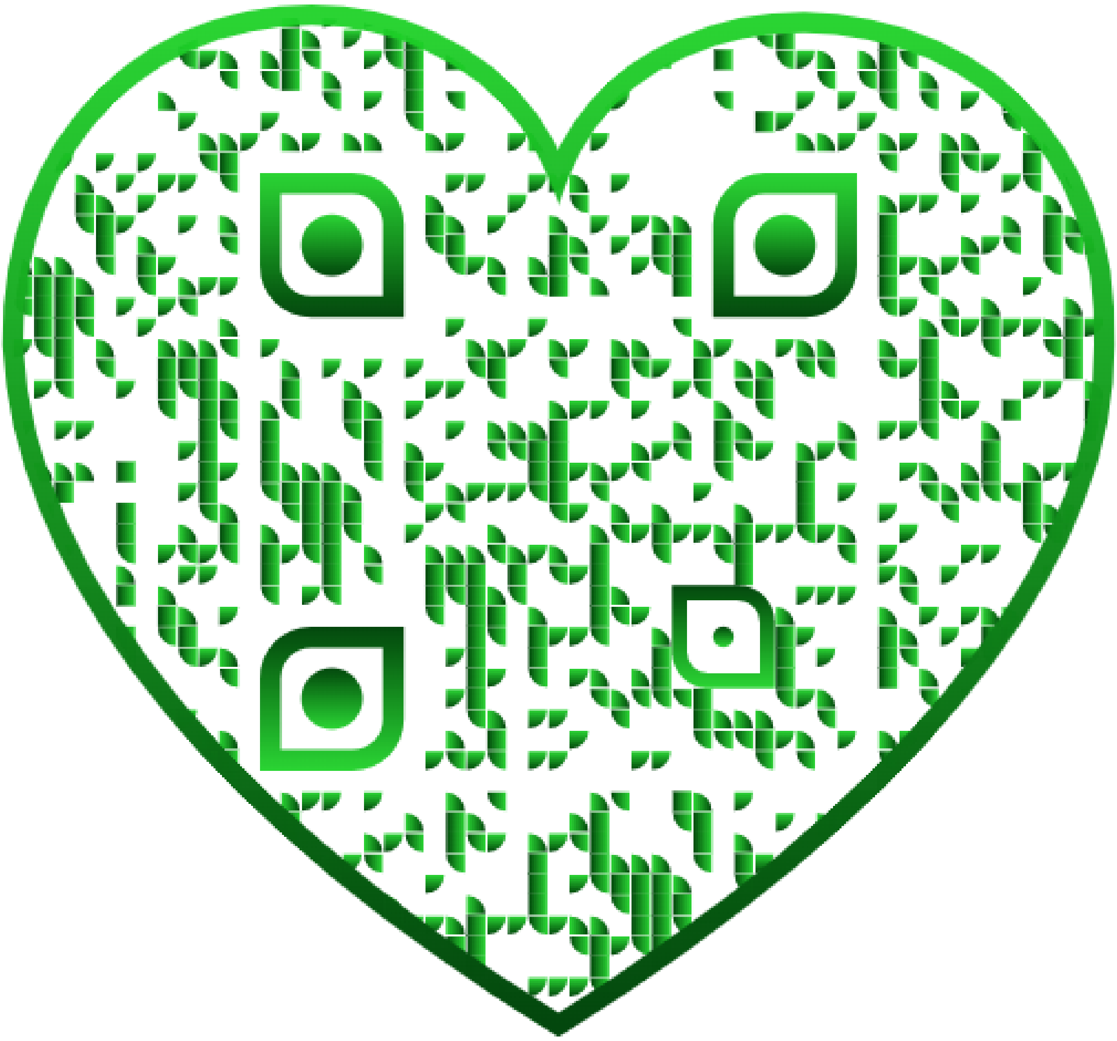
How Hitler's **U-boats** pushed Britain to the brink



Fake news and the Dreyfus affair
The media-fuelled scandal that divided France

1066: NOT ALL THAT
Should we ditch our obsession with dates?

HOUNDS OF HELL
A spooky history of Britain's ghost dogs



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WELCOME

NOVEMBER 2025

“In his memoirs of the Second World War, Winston Churchill wrote: “The only thing that ever really frightened me during the war was **the U-boat peril**.” It’s not hard to understand why. If Britain couldn’t feed itself or supply its factories then the war would surely have been lost, regardless of the situation on overseas battlefields. Fortunately, Britain and its allies eventually triumphed in the Battle of the Atlantic, but, as the historian Roger Moorhouse notes in his cover feature this month, it was a close-run thing.

Roger’s piece also focuses on **the conduct of the U-boat war**. It’s often been assumed that, as in other theatres, the German crews paid little regard to the rules of war and committed several atrocities against their foes. But, through his new research, Roger has come to a different, surprising, conclusion. Read what he has to say on page 22.

Elsewhere this month, we’re heading back to **the medieval era and rummaging around their cabinets of cures**. James Freeman delves into the sources to reveal how you’d have been treated for common complaints in the Middle Ages – and some of their remedies weren’t as outlandish as you might have thought. His article is on page 30.

Finally, Halloween is getting closer and some of you may be devising terrifying costumes for this frightful evening. One idea you might not have considered is dressing as a **phantom dog**. But if you did you would be in good company because ghoulish canines abound in British history, as Karen Jones explains in her piece on page 48. Read it if you dare.

Rob Attar
Editor

THREE THINGS I’VE LEARNED THIS MONTH

1. Late to the table
It’s hard to imagine eating most meals without forks, but as I learned in *Q&A* this month, this piece of cutlery was not commonly used in England until the 17th century (page 45).

2. One-sided picture
In Caroline McCaffrey-Howarth’s contribution to this month’s *Conversation* section, she mentioned the fact that only 27 of the National Gallery’s more than 2,300 paintings were by women artists (page 14).

3. Time for change
Nowadays we’re all used to there being one consistent time across the UK, but it was interesting to discover that, until the 19th century, British cities all worked to their own times, sometimes varying by as much as 30 minutes from one another (page 63).

THIS ISSUE’S CONTRIBUTORS

Louise Devoy
“Every time we glance at our watches or check our location on our phones, we’re relying on the extraordinary work done by generations of astronomers at the Royal Observatory, Greenwich.”
Louise highlights eight landmark moments in the Royal Observatory’s history on page 60

Sudhir Hazareesingh
“Africa exerted a profound influence on the cultures of resistance to slavery, yet its role is often overlooked in the literature.”
Sudhir discusses his new book looking at how enslaved people resisted their oppressors on page 68

Christienna Fryar
“Few institutions teach more people about the past than museums. That’s what makes the question of who decides what stories they tell so vexed.”
Christienna shares her thoughts on how museums can adapt to the demands of the 21st century on page 11

Mike Rapport
“When I discuss France since 1789 with my students, we note how far its divided politics still persist – and how the Dreyfus affair, in particular, continues to resonate today.”
Mike reveals how a media-fuelled frenzy rocked 1890s France on page 36

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ON THE COVER: HMS BARHAM IS HIT BY A GERMAN U-BOAT IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA IN 1941; IT SANK WITH THE LOSS OF 859 LIVES: ALAMY.
BACKGROUND: DREAMSTIME. MEDICINE: ALAMY. GHOST DOG ILLUSTRATION: LAURIE AVON. . THIS PAGE: FRAN MONKS/GLEN MCBETH/GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY

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1066 AND ALL THAT
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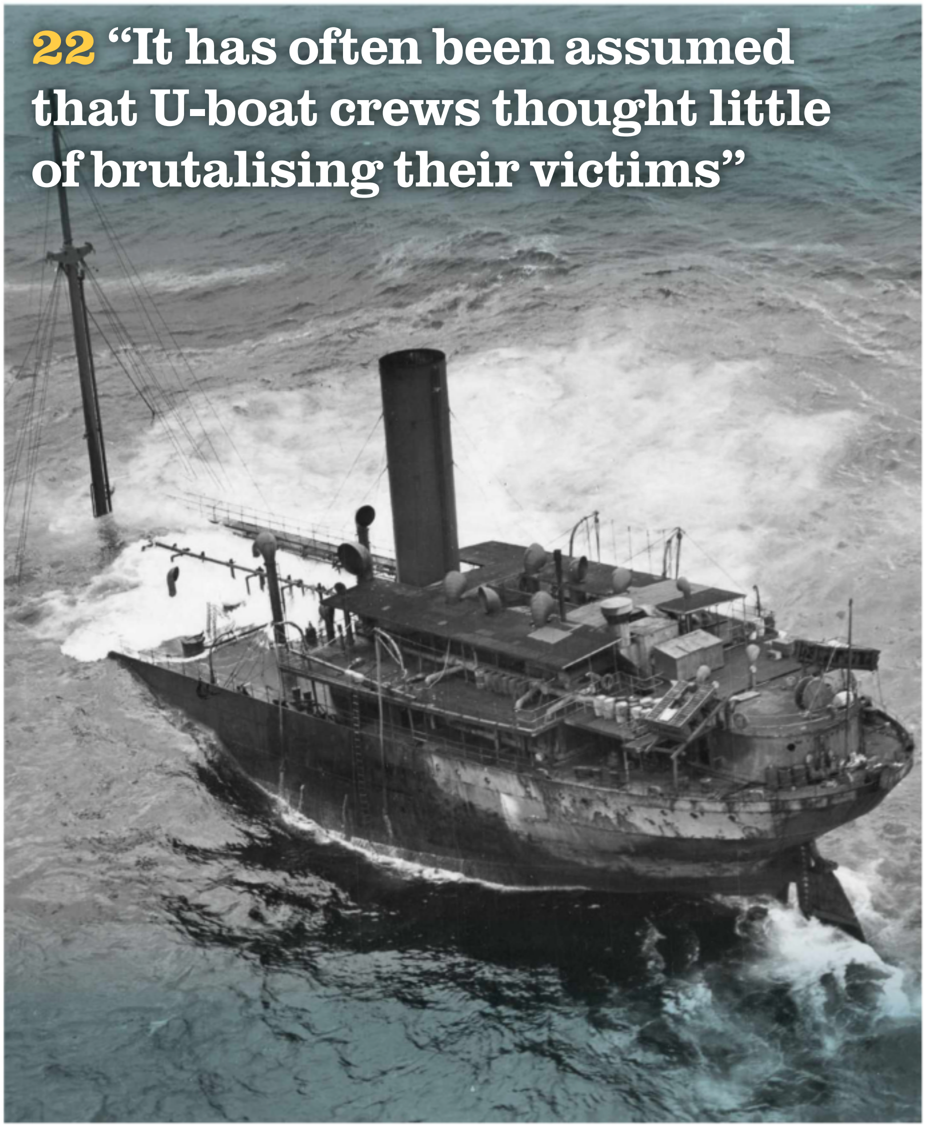

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ROYAL MUSEUMS GREENWICH/GETTY IMAGES/FRAN MONKS

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ANNIVERSARIES

DANNY BIRD highlights events that took place in November in history

27 NOVEMBER 1542

Chinese concubines attempt to murder the emperor

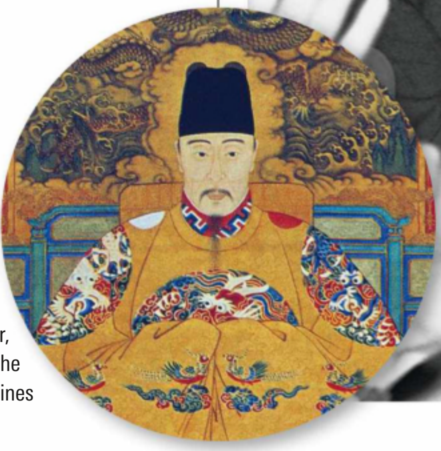
A Ming dynasty plot in the Forbidden City ends in failure

Within the hushed precincts of Beijing's Forbidden City, the Jiajing Emperor slept, oblivious to the danger creeping closer. Worn down by cruelty and humiliation, at least 16 palace women had bound themselves in a desperate conspiracy. For years, they had been abused, kept on rigid diets of mulberry leaves and rainwater, and had their first menstruation harvested for the emperor's strange 'red lead' elixir of immortality. Beaten for defiance, discarded if unwell, their youth and dignity consumed, they turned at last to vengeance.

A hemp rope was lassoed around the emperor's neck while the women held him down and began to stab his flesh with their hairpins. The Son of Heaven flailed before sinking into unconsciousness. For a moment, triumph seemed within reach, but fear undid them. Zhang Jinlian, one of their number, lost her nerve and betrayed the plot, rushing to Empress Fang. The consort freed the emperor, summoned guards and resolved to eliminate the would-be regicides.

Justice, if it could be called that, was pitiless. The women were condemned to *lingchi* – otherwise known as 'slow slicing' or 'death by a thousand cuts', with their dismembered bodies left as a warning. Members of the women's families were executed too, as well as the consort Duan, who was not involved in the plot.

The palace plot of the Renyin year (the traditional Chinese convention for naming 60-year cycles) shocked Ming China. Nevertheless, the emperor, shaken but unrepentant, demanded still younger girls for his 'elixir'. He died in 1566 or 1567, aged about 60.



A palace portrait of the Jiajing Emperor, who narrowly escaped death at the hands of his brutalised concubines

Travelling home to his Springwood estate, President Roosevelt salutes supporters in Kingston, New York

BRIDGEMAN/GETTY IMAGES

Archaeologist Howard Carter examines Tutankhamun's elaborate sarcophagus

26 NOVEMBER 1922

Howard Carter chisels through the sealed entrance to Tutankhamun's tomb, becoming the first person to look inside for more than 3,000 years. He marvels at the glittering treasures, golden artefacts and exquisite relics.

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5 NOVEMBER 1940

FDR becomes the only US president to win a third term

The shadow of global conflict looms over an unprecedented election

Tension crackled across the United States as voters headed to the polls, their votes set to decide whether Franklin Delano Roosevelt would make history by winning a third term as president. Just months after Nazi Germany had conquered several European democracies, America faced a moment of profound uncertainty. Roosevelt, already synonymous with the New Deal deployed to tackle the Great Depression of the 1930s, confronted Republican Wendell L Willkie, a candidate who criticised the president's use of executive power yet largely backed his domestic policies.

The Republicans, smarting from defeats in 1932 and 1936, had coalesced behind Willkie only after hopefuls such as Thomas Dewey and Robert Taft had faltered. Willkie's platform urged fiscal restraint and efficient governance. Meanwhile, Roosevelt leveraged the power of incumbency, pointing to decisive action such as the transfer of 50 over-age destroyers to Britain in exchange for strategic naval bases. This was a harbinger of the Lend-Lease programme – a plan to provide US military aid without direct involvement in the war – to come.

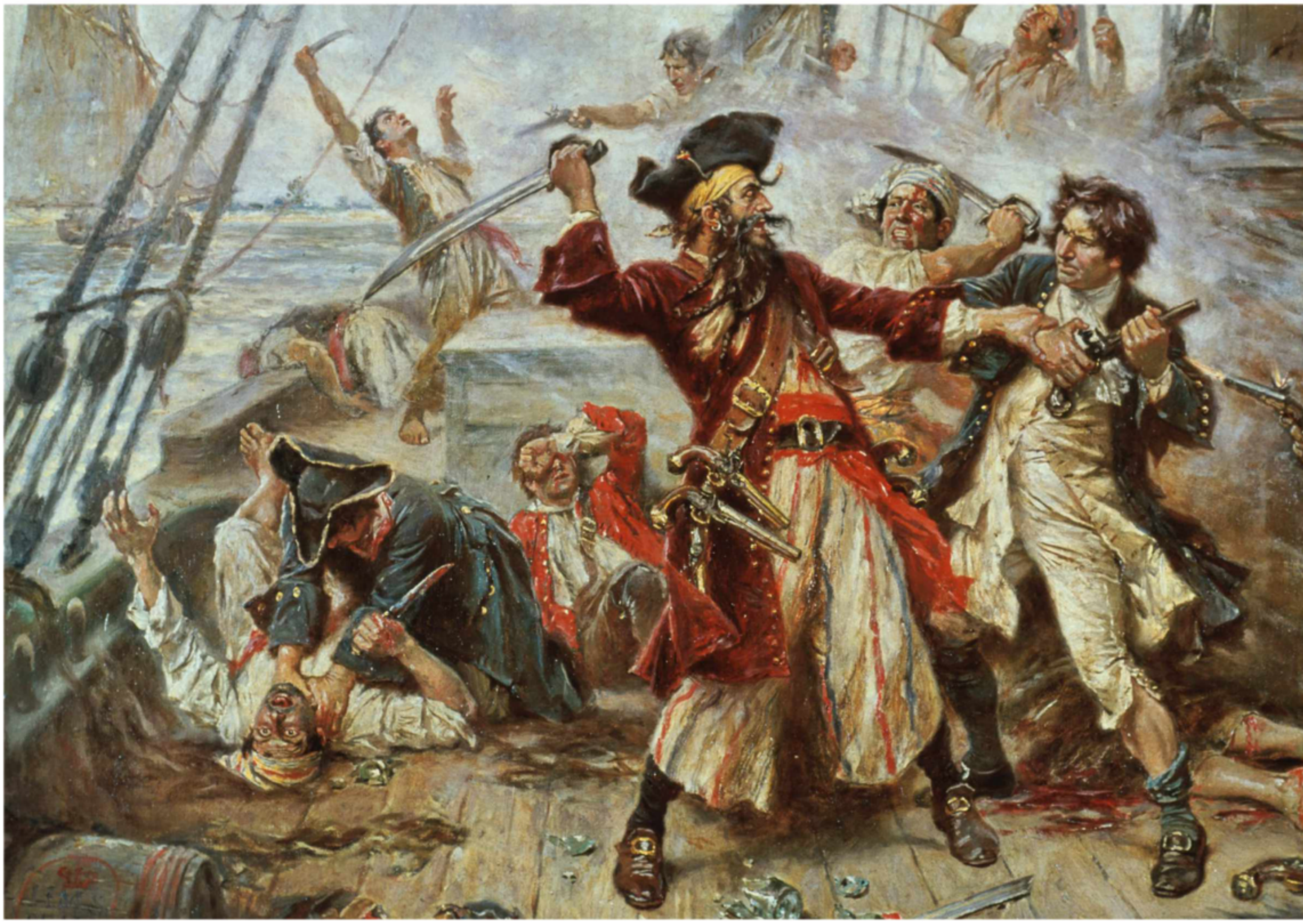
Citizens weighed continuity against change. When the results came in, Roosevelt had won 54.7 per cent of the popular vote (more than 27 million Americans) and 449 electoral votes. He promised to maintain neutrality, yet global crises would soon demand bold action.

By nightfall, as the nation absorbed the magnitude of the outcome, it became clear that Roosevelt had done more than just get re-elected. Rather, he had cemented his place as a towering figure in US history. And this election foreshadowed an even more extraordinary milestone: in 1944, Roosevelt would secure a fourth term. His unique tenure prompted the Twenty-Second Amendment in 1951, limiting future presidents to two terms.

20 NOVEMBER 1947

Princess Elizabeth glides down Westminster Abbey's aisle to marry her cousin, the erstwhile Prince of Greece and Denmark, Philip Mountbatten, newly titled as the Duke of Edinburgh. BBC Radio broadcasts the ceremony to 200 million people across the world.

A 21-year-old Princess Elizabeth smiles broadly on her wedding day. She had become secretly engaged in 1946



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22 NOVEMBER 1718

Blackbeard's reign of terror comes to an end

History's most notorious pirate falls prey to the Royal Navy

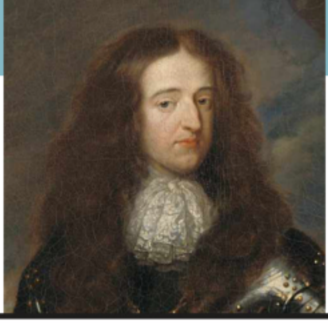
On a cold morning in North Carolina's Ocracoke Inlet, an infamous career was ending in smoke, blood and fury. Edward Teach, better known as 'Blackbeard', the most notorious pirate of his age, was about to meet a violent death in keeping with his life. Yet for all the chaos of the fighting at Ocracoke, Blackbeard's downfall wasn't the result of a chance encounter – it had been set in motion months before.

In May, he had blockaded Charleston, South Carolina, holding ships and passengers hostage until a ransom of medicines was delivered. Soon after, his flagship, *Queen Anne's Revenge,* ran aground near Beaufort, North Carolina. Whether this was by accident or design, many believed he used the wreck to rid himself of surplus crew and secure the best plunder for a smaller, loyal circle.

Blackbeard briefly accepted a pardon from North Carolina's governor, Charles Eden, marrying a planter's daughter and seemingly turning respectable. But this was a ruse. By summer, he was back at sea, seizing merchantmen under the cover of Eden's protection. His flaunting of royal authority enraged Virginia's governor, Alexander Spotswood, who resolved to end the pirate's reign of terror. He sent Lieutenant Robert Maynard of the Royal Navy to hunt down Blackbeard, promising a bounty of £100 (around £19,000 today) for the pirate's head.

On 21 November, Maynard's two small sloops, *Jane* and *Ranger*, slipped into the waters around Ocracoke Island, where Blackbeard was anchored aboard the *Adventure*. At dawn the next day, the ambush began. Blackbeard quickly realised the trap and roared defiance, swearing he would neither give nor take quarter. His cannon thundered, tearing through Maynard's men and leaving the deck littered with dead. Sensing victory, the pirate lashed his vessel alongside *Jane* and led his men aboard.

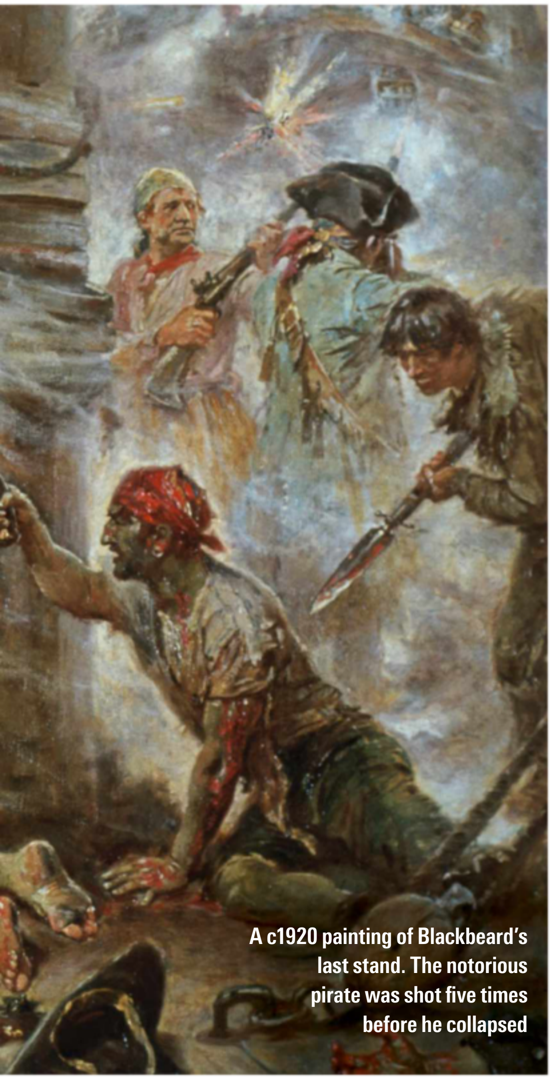
But Maynard had concealed most of his surviving crew below deck. As soon as the



William of Orange was King of England, Ireland and Scotland from 1689–1702

5 NOVEMBER 1688

William of Orange lands near Torbay in Devon, sparking what will become known as the 'Glorious Revolution'. Troops disembark swiftly, asserting control as locals watch nervously. News soon reaches London as soldiers abandon the Catholic king James II & VII and William marches inland, salving the fears of Protestants.



A c1920 painting of Blackbeard's last stand. The notorious pirate was shot five times before he collapsed

pirates had embarked, the trap was sprung. The ship became the scene of a brutal melee. Pistols cracked, cutlasses clashed, and smoke and blood mingled in the air. Blackbeard fought like a demon, laughing off wounds as if immortal. Surrounded, he was finally struck down. Maynard reported that Blackbeard had been shot five times and suffered 20 cutlass wounds before he collapsed.

His head was severed and hung from *Jane*'s bowsprit as proof of the death, while his body was flung into the waters, where legend claims it swam around the ship before sinking. A dozen pirates lay dead, the rest of Blackbeard's crew were captured.

Thus ended Edward Teach, scourge of the seas. His campaign of bold raids and defiance of the crown was at an end, but the myth of Blackbeard and his terrifying image could not so easily be extinguished.

GETTY IMAGES

A relief shows the god Amun blessing Alexander the Great, shown here as a pharaoh

14 NOVEMBER 332 BC

Alexander the Great becomes a living god

The Macedonian king is hailed as pharaoh in Egypt

The city of Memphis erupted in a roar of awe and devotion as Alexander III of Macedon made his entry. Towering temples and gleaming obelisks cast long shadows over the streets thronged with cheering Egyptians and Macedonian soldiers. According to one much later account, priests in flowing linen robes presented the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt, placing it upon Alexander's head in the Temple of Ptah.

The high priest proclaimed him "son of the gods", Horus the Golden One, beloved of Ra and chosen by Amun – a living deity walking among mortals. Alexander embraced the Egyptian pantheon, equating Zeus with Amun. What followed was a blending of cultures that would dominate the eastern Mediterranean for centuries.

He had arrived after a lightning campaign across Asia Minor and the Levant, routing Persian forces and capturing Tyre and Gaza. The Persian satrap, Mazaces, seeing resistance as futile, surrendered Egypt without a fight. Its people, long oppressed under Persian rule and resentful of desecrated temples, hailed Alexander as a liberator. With the treasury secured and the administration reorganised under trusted officials, he advanced south along the Nile, absorbing the grandeur of a civilisation older than memory.

Weeks later, he founded the future city of Alexandria, his architects sketching its streets with barley meal scattered on the dark soil. Ravens guided him through the desert to Siwa, where the oracle of Amun confirmed his divine parentage.

In that moment, Alexander was no longer merely a Macedonian king. He was pharaoh, a living god, a bridge between Greek ambition and Egyptian eternity – his name etched forever in the stones, temples and legends of his newest realm.

Danny Bird is content producer on *BBC History Magazine*

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Partly gilded cartonnage mask, 380–30 BCE, cartonnage (linen and paste), gold and paint. Photograph © The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge

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LEGENDA
by Janina Ramirez

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Sat 8th Nov — The Gate, Cardiff
Tue 27th Jan — Norwich Theatre Playhouse
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Published 6th November
By WH Allen

Janina Ramirez
LEGENDA
The Real Women Behind the Myths that Shaped Europe

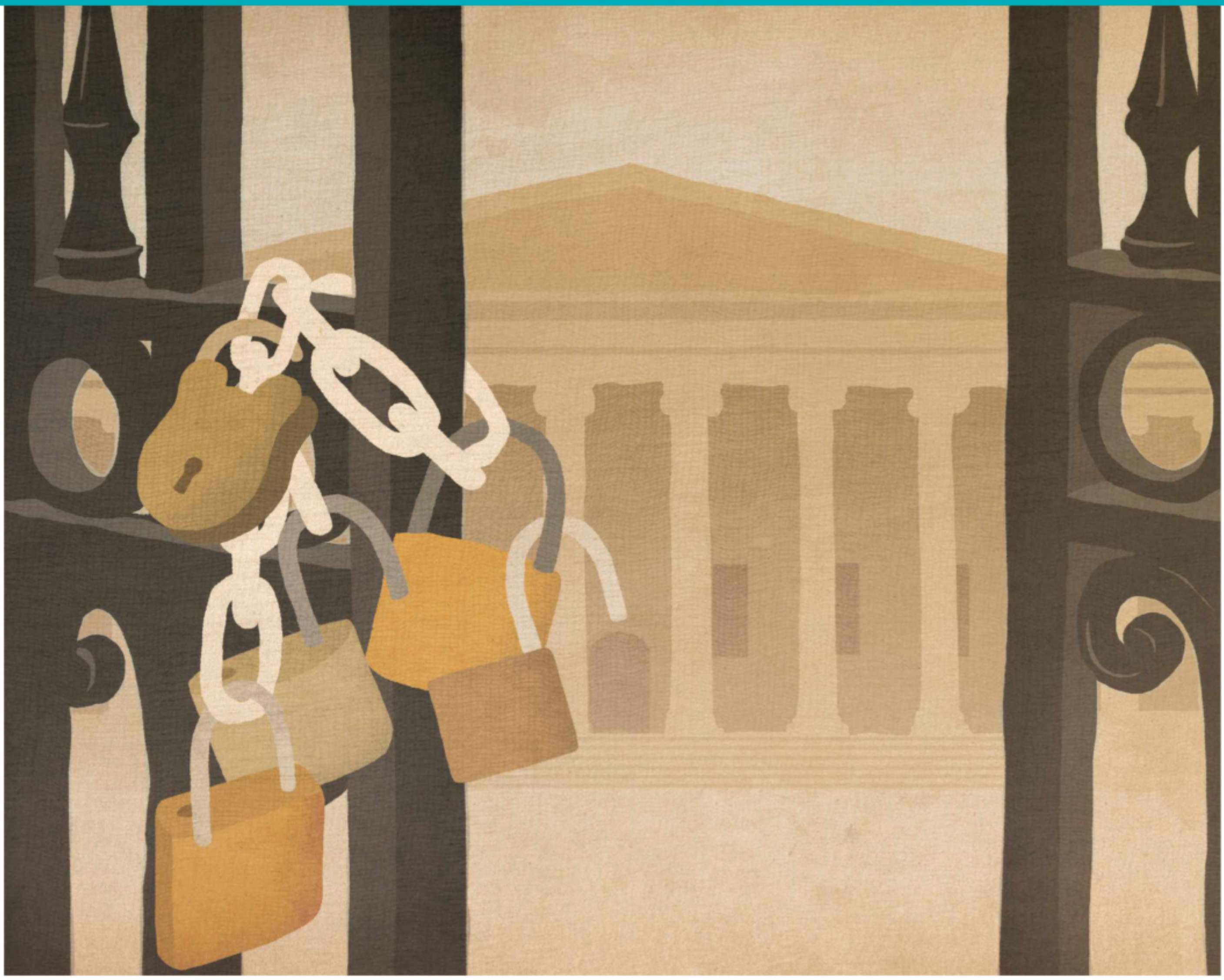


ILLUSTRATION BY **HUGH COWLING**

THE BIG QUESTIONS

Who should decide the stories museums tell?

Increasingly, museums are being challenged on how they select, display and interpret their collections. Six historians explain how these institutions can adapt to suit 21st-century audiences

COMPILED BY **MATT ELTON**

"If museums truly want to be inclusive, they should tell the full life history of every object in their collection"

JUSTIN M JACOBS

It has become fashionable today for critics of major western museums to call for a 'reckoning' or 'coming to terms' with the imperialist and racist histories of some institutions. This approach is rooted in the idea that, every time a museum chooses to tell a particular story, this story inevitably reflects the unconscious biases of the curators who tell it.

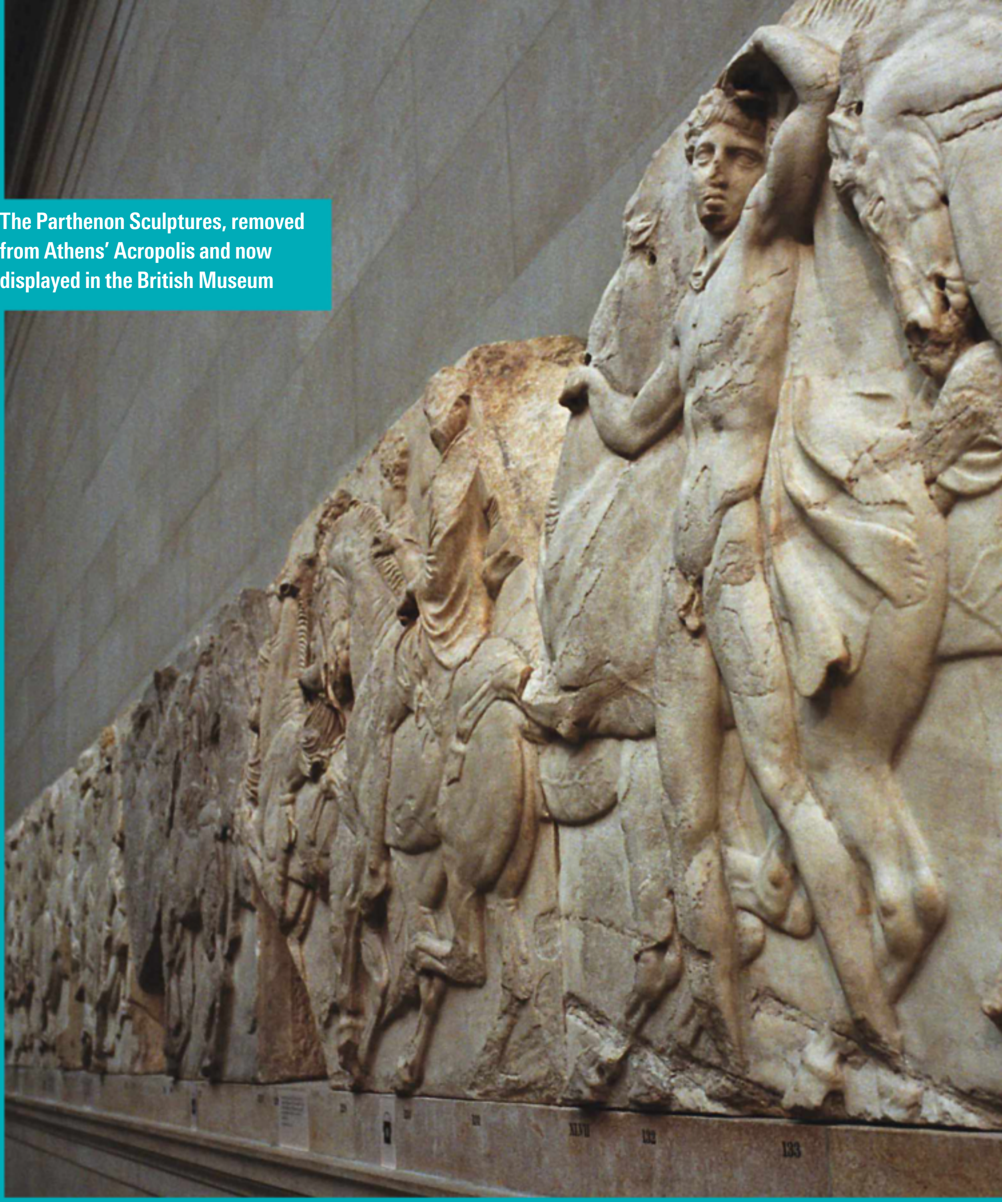
There's much to recommend this approach – but there's also a problem. Too often, institutions simply replace the bygone voices of long-dead white men with the present-day voices of people descended from the communities or nations that originally produced the artefact on display. But is this really a more inclusive approach?

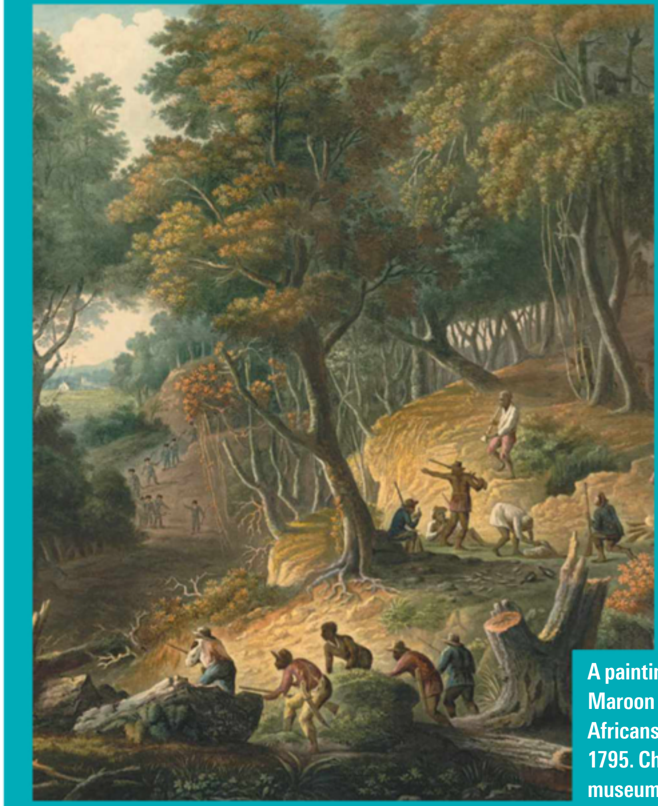
Scholars who study the history of artefacts in museums are acutely aware that nearly every object on display has served different functions and had a different symbolic value down the years. In addition, many diverse peoples have owned or interacted with these objects. It follows that choosing to tell only a single story closely associated with present-day ideological agendas does a great disservice to the museum-going public.

Take the Parthenon (or Elgin) Marbles, for instance. Over the course of the past 2,000 years, they have played an integral role in embodying the political power and cultural beliefs of the ancient Athenians, Romans, Christians, Muslims, British and modern Greeks. Yet according to current intellectual fashions and political sympathies, only one of these stories is deemed legitimate: that promoted by the modern Greeks.

This, of course, is merely a reflection of the unconscious bias of our own day and age, which consistently promotes the alleged authenticity of nation states that didn't even exist prior to the modern era. This is the very antithesis of an inclusive approach. If museums truly want to be inclusive, they should tell the full life history and evolving symbolisms of every object in their collection – even when these stories don't reflect the ideological trends of the present moment.

Justin M Jacobs is a professor of history at American University in Washington, DC, and the author of *Plunder? How Museums Got Their Treasures* (Reaktion Books, 2024)


The Parthenon Sculptures, removed from Athens' Acropolis and now displayed in the British Museum


A painting shows members of the Maroon community of formerly enslaved Africans during an ambush in Jamaica, 1795. Christienna Fryar argues that museums should cover their story more

e Bristol what it is...

Some exhibitions are co-created by external groups at Bristol's M Shed

GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY

"There is something colonial about leaving decisions on displays to only those who can afford to work in museums"

CHRISTIENNA FRYAR

Few institutions teach more people about the past than museums. Historians may wish otherwise, but more people pop into a museum or National Trust property on a day out than read the latest scholarship. It's their importance that has made the question of who decides what stories museums tell so vexed in recent years.

These questions are necessary, because museums are colonial institutions. They flourished in the 18th and 19th centuries as repositories for the so-called curiosities European collectors had purloined from territories abroad. Museums in the west still claim to be the best protectors of treasures that countries of origin want back.

Then there's the matter of who works in museums. Entry-level museum jobs are often poorly paid and based in expensive cities – not very attractive to people whose families cannot subsidise their lives. There is also something colonial about leaving decisions on displays to only those who can afford to work in museums and who received traditional university educations.

Museums must work more consciously, consistently and collaboratively with descendant historians (those who research people they descend from), curators, artists and storytellers. Many institutions now cite co-production as a key value, but employing these experts and paying them appropriately is as important as working with local volunteer groups to design exhibitions. Descendant experts often use family histories and community knowledge to tell stories ignored by traditional scholarship.

Take the history of enslavement. Too often, the focus in Britain is on the goods that circulated the Atlantic basin in the so-called 'Triangular Trade' (often sidestepping the brutality of the trade in humans) and the money that changed hands. But what about the swamps and the mountains where fugitives from slavery established Maroon communities? Museums are also responsible for telling these stories of survival, daring, skill, environmental know-how and community.

Christienna Fryar is a historian of Britain and the Caribbean, and CEO of the Liverpool charity Mary Seacole House

"In the 21st century, there need to be multiple stories in and about the museum – and multiple storytellers"

ADAM MOSLEY

The origins of today's museums lie in pre-modern princely and scholarly collections. Historically, the collectors – along with the curators they employed and those who followed them – exerted considerable power over the museum as a space in which the world was represented and knowledge was produced.

Curators still play a key role in choosing and shaping the stories their institutions are best positioned to tell. Many are enormously knowledgeable about the objects in their care, and it would be a tragedy to disregard their expertise, or that of academics, when using heritage collections to illuminate past, present and future.

However, most curators and scholars know that they cannot and should not monopolise the generation of stories. It would be futile, in any case, for curators – let alone politicians – to attempt to dictate absolutely the message conveyed in any exhibition. Visitors bring with them their own memories, insights and perspectives. Their knowledge can supplement or correct that of 'experts'. They may connect with displays emotionally in unexpected ways. They have stories of their own to tell about what they find in a museum.

Increasingly, museums work in partnership with the public to tell new stories with their collections, to give a voice to those historically under-represented and excluded, and to unlock the meaning of their holdings for diverse audiences. Histories get rewritten in the museum, just as they do in universities. Sometimes these fresh interpretations can cause discomfort to those who would prefer museums to retell familiar stories. New perspectives can also challenge the very grounds on which a museum claims the right to hold particular objects.

The ways in which museums are responding to these kinds of dialogues constitutes an evolving story in itself – one concerned with whose views matter and how to deal with problematic legacies from the past. In the 21st century, there need to be multiple stories in and about the museum – and multiple storytellers, too. Single-voice stories are no longer sufficient.

Adam Mosley is an associate professor in history at Swansea University

"Two-thirds of curators in the UK are women – but museum leadership is still largely an old boys' club"

CAROLINE MCCAFFREY-HOWARTH

Henry Cole, the first director of the South Kensington Museum (now the V&A) from 1857, once declared that museums should be a "schoolroom for everyone". But that begs a question: who sets the curriculum?

Who is making the decisions on which stories museums tell, and why? Is it the curatorial team, senior management, external funding bodies or the gift shop? And what is the demographic of these groups? Although two-thirds of museum curators in the UK are women, museum leadership is still largely an old boys' club. Recent reports by Art Fund and the Museum X project have shown that cultural diversity across the sector is at an all-time low. Can we ever truly diversify the stories that museums tell without first achieving greater diversity in the museum workforce?

My own research focuses on art collectors, particularly the agency of women, non-binary and trans people. This topic is being explored across more museums thanks to schemes such as Katy Hessel's audio series *Museums Without Men*. The National Gallery, too, is conducting research into female benefactors, noting the fact that only 27 out of its 2,300 paintings are by women.

It's 140 years since Lady Charlotte Schreiber, one of the greatest Victorian collectors, split her trove of 5,000 objects between the V&A and the British Museum. Charlotte was determined that the artworks she spent decades researching should become the property of the nation. Honouring the spirit of that act of generosity, surely we have a duty to be in dialogue with the public and to keep them at the forefront of the stories that museums choose to tell?

I believe that the future lies in collaboration and co-creation through public engagement. Museums are most successful when they reach out and establish meaningful dialogues with local communities, artists, academics, PhD students, schoolchildren, youth groups and more. Museums should be places of curiosity, creativity and connection that are always changing and evolving – just like the stories they should tell.

Caroline McCaffrey-Howarth is a senior lecturer in the history of art at the University of Edinburgh, and the author of *Lady Charlotte Schreiber* (Lund Humphries, 2025)

"Museums need to be alert to the risk of a fragmentation of culture and history"

JEREMY BLACK

Museums should inform, educate, inspire, entertain and preserve – but this says nothing about how best to do this. Which objects in the permanent holding should be shown? How should museums drum up interest? How should holdings be curated, and how best explained? What temporary exhibitions should be commissioned? How should collaborations be organised? Who should be guest curators? What role should the public or government play?

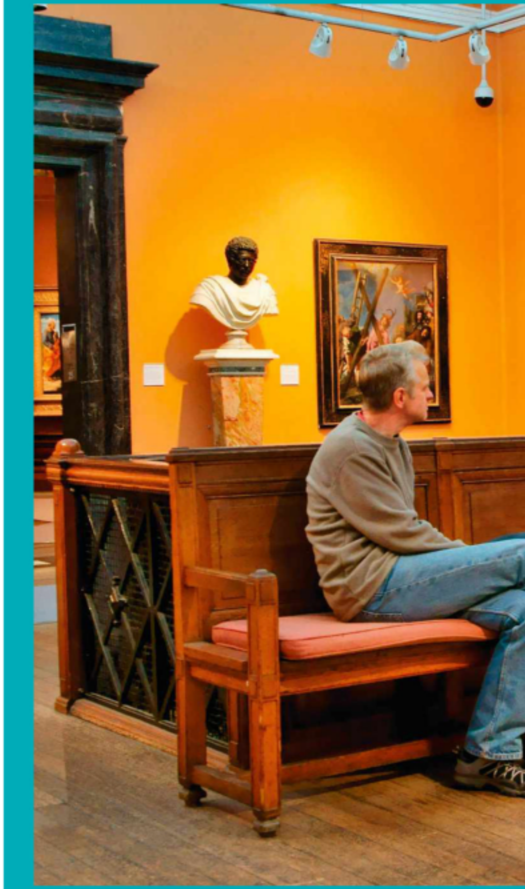
In 2024, Birmingham Museums established a Citizens' Jury. This summer, the National Gallery announced the launch of NG Citizens – the first time a UK gallery or museum has set up a national citizens' assembly. These bodies will presumably question the aesthetic judgment of curators. There will be lapses and controversies. Nevertheless, it is always good for an institution to find out what its potential audience wants.

Of course, not everyone is happy about such initiatives, but their legitimacy is difficult to deny in a democracy. The National Gallery has a clue in the name: it is supposed to be *national*. More generally, developing processes that promote and support public involvement puts institutions in a solid position when defending the way they present their collections, put on and organise exhibitions or justify funding applications. An institution is harder to criticise if a cross-section of the population has advised it.

In pursuing such public involvement, it is necessary to avoid 'pillarisation' – a term borrowed from the Dutch *verzuiling*, which describes a society in which different groups have their own distinct social institutions and organisations. Apply this to museums and there's a risk of different interest groups, however defined and represented, putting on exhibitions or organising collections to reflect what they prefer.

Museums need to be alert to the risk of a fragmentation of culture and history, which can in turn create an endless spiral of groups spawning sub-groups, and museums becoming mired in controversy. Yet, though democratic processes of consultation pose many problems, the alternatives are worse.

Jeremy Black is a historian, formerly a professor at the University of Exeter, and the author of more than 180 books



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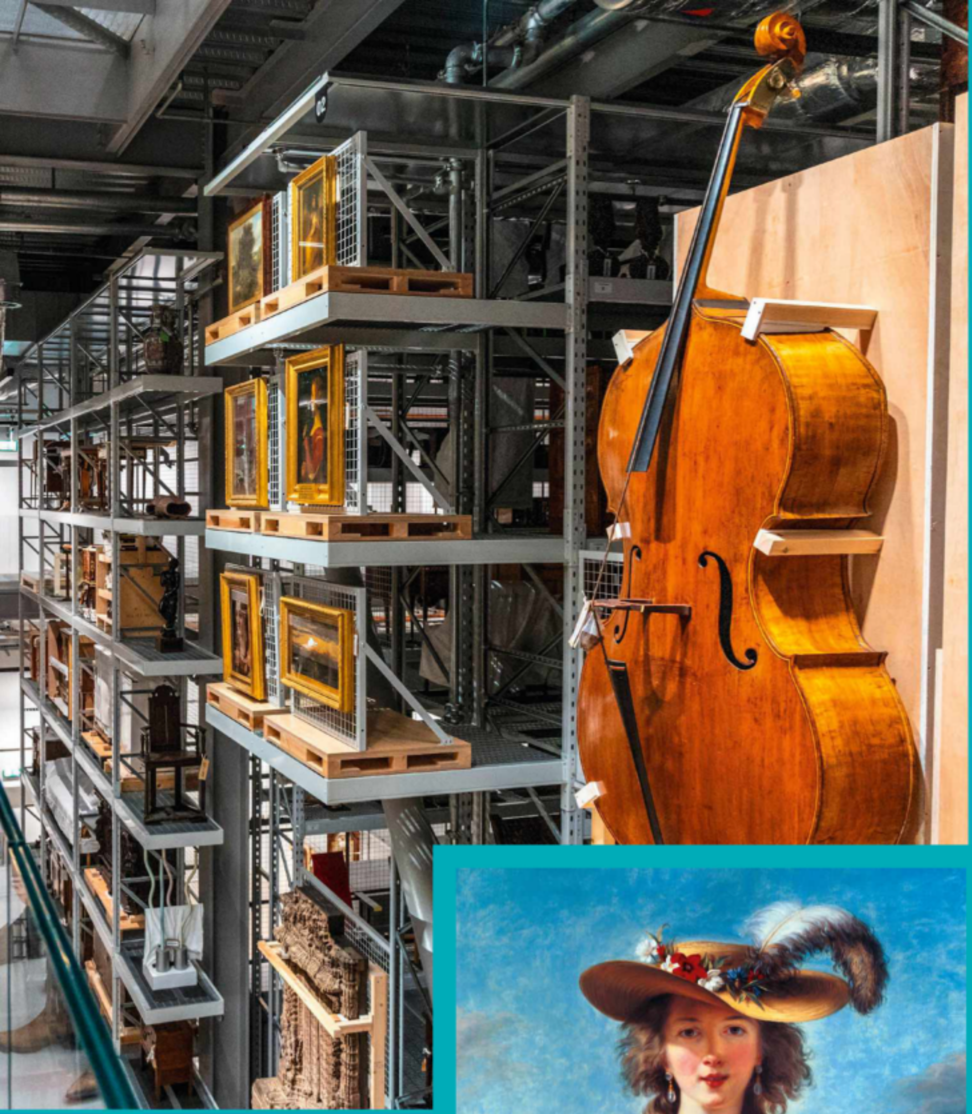
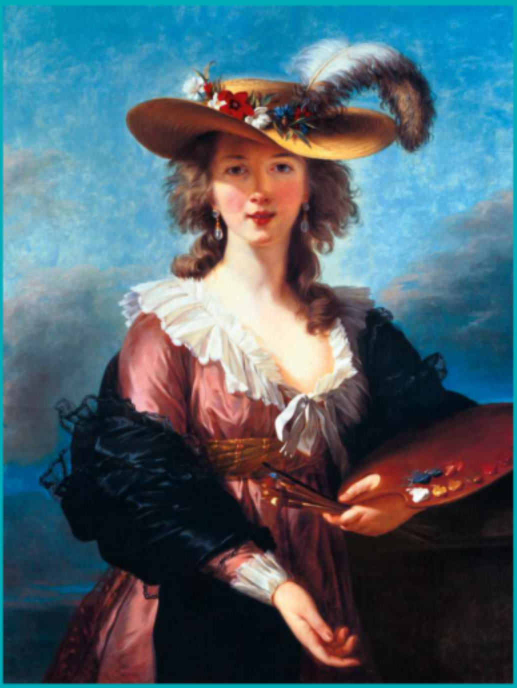




FROM TOP: The recently opened V&A East Storehouse allows visitors to explore collections unfiltered by curators; a 1782 self-portrait by French artist Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun – one of only 27 works by women among the National Gallery's 2,300 paintings; inside Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery. Last year Birmingham Museums established a Citizens' Jury

Who do you think should decide the stories that museums tell? Let us know at *letters@historyextra.com*

"Ideas once thought impossible, such as the return of the Parthenon Marbles to Greece, are now frequently discussed"

MIRJAM S BRUSIUS

For a long time, museums have suggested that each object has just one official story – the one written on its label. Large institutions such as the British Museum often present themselves as neutral spaces that show the world simultaneously from 'nowhere and everywhere'. Yet this approach rarely acknowledges how these objects were collected, nor how museums reshape the objects' presentation to fit particular narratives.

So who really speaks through the labels we see in museums? Is it a team of curators, one individual or the institution as a whole? And why do labels usually rely on expert voices instead of including personal accounts by those who used these objects, or the histories of how the objects entered the collection in the first place?

These questions feel especially urgent today. Museums are under growing pressure to confront their colonial legacies, to consider returning certain objects, and to tell stories that include more perspectives. Ideas once thought impossible – such as the return of the Parthenon Marbles to Greece – are now frequently discussed. Still, while demands for repatriation have been voiced for decades, many communities remain unheard, many stories untold.

It is time for museums to rethink how they frame their collections. This means creating space for voices from the global south where many of these objects originated, and acknowledging their cultural and historical significance beyond western narratives. We have an opportunity today to reimagine these institutions as spaces for dialogue, reflection and accountability.

One way forward is through even more participatory approaches, involving both visitors and source communities in shaping museum narratives. New tools – digital platforms, interactive displays, labels that offer multiple perspectives – can help objects tell more than one story. This approach could not only enrich our understanding of the past but also transform museums into more inclusive, honest and engaging spaces. H

Mirjam S Brusius is a historian and one of the initiators of *100 Histories of 100 Worlds in 1 Object* (*100histories100worlds.org*)

MICHAEL WOOD ON...
THE FALL AND RISE OF ASIA ON THE WORLD STAGE

"Emperor Jahangir and Shah Abbas literally bestride the world like colossi"

WATCHING THE RECENT SPECTACLE OF THOSE latter-day emperors President Xi of China and India's Narendra Modi hugging each other at the summit in Tianjin, my mind cast back to an earlier image of a pan-Asian summit.

There's a wonderful painting from 1618 of the Mughal emperor Jahangir embracing Shah Abbas of Iran (below, Jahangir on the right) – one of several such pictures painted for the Indian ruler. These heads of two superpowers were in fact not bosom buddies but intense geopolitical rivals, especially in the Kandahar region of south-west Afghanistan, then under Mughal control. Framed by a huge golden halo, in an image of peace, one stands on a lamb, the other on a lion, both on a globe whose surface extends from the strait of Gibraltar to the South China Sea: they literally bestride the world like colossi. In the foreground of the map, a product of the new science of cartography, are shown north Africa, India and south-east Asia, with the Nile, the Ganges and the Yangtze accurately depicted. The painting is allegorical; the hoped-for meeting never actually took place. But the timing, and the details, have much to tell us.

In the painting, western Europe lies, unseen, over the horizon. Yet at that moment the small, aggressive maritime powers on the edge of the Eurasian landmass were already extending their influence and carving up the New World – and were now threatening the old powers in the Asiatic heartland of civilisation. The Spanish had begun colonisation of the Philippines in 1565, the Portuguese leased Macao in 1557, the English East India Company was founded in 1600, and the Dutch East India Company was established two years later. Elizabeth I had earlier sent an ambassador to Jahangir's father, Akbar, to negotiate trade links. In another painting, Jahangir greets a Sufi mystic in the presence of the Ottoman Sultan and King James VI & I – not an imaginary likeness but one taken from a portrait brought to India by the ambassador Thomas Roe in 1616. In an uncanny touch by the painter, James stares coolly out of the picture, straight at the viewer, as if to say: "Our time has come." And it had.

The Mughal artist Abu al-Hasan, who painted that magnificent picture of Jahangir and Abbas, cannot have imagined that his world – the world stretching from the Mediterranean to the Yellow Sea, created by the great Asiatic civilisations – was about to be shaken to its core by the violent energies, the inventiveness and the sheer ambition of the Europeans.

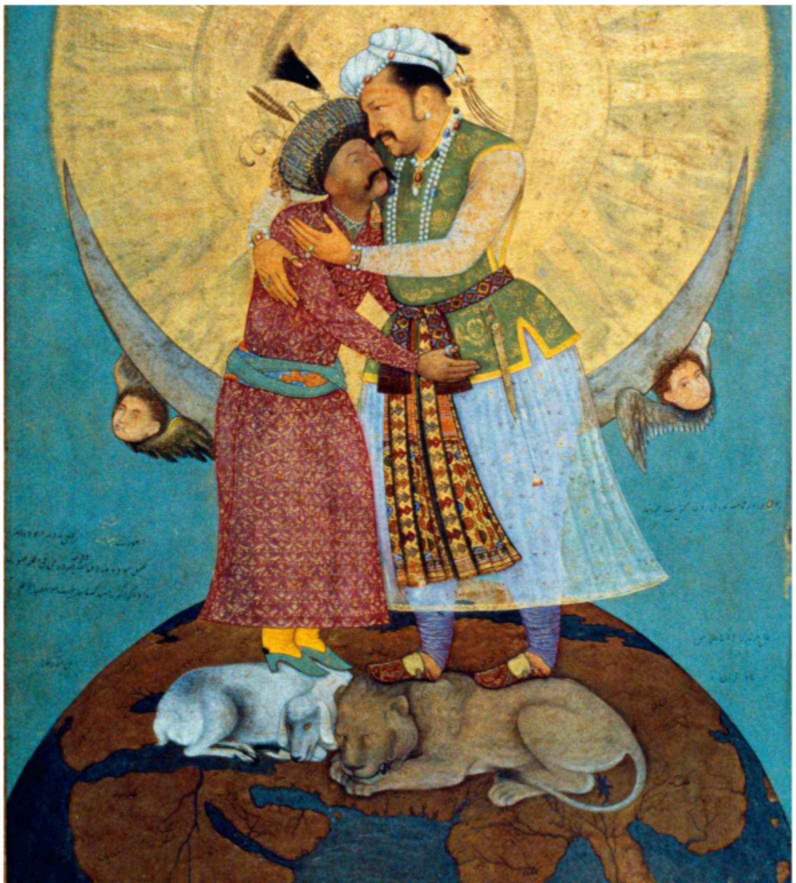
Jahangir never got his summit with Shah Abbas. Nor did he meet the ailing Wanli Emperor, who was destined to die a couple of years later in Beijing. Since then, the turning of the wheel of history has been astounding: empires, world wars, the colonisation of entire continents, the triumph of capitalism – changes so huge that it is hardly possible to take them all in. The world has been remade in our likeness. And now, in 2025, President Xi hosts a summit calling for an alternative world order – "a more just and equitable global governance system".

We may not like President Xi's choice of friends, but such is the realpolitik of our age. And to be sure, some would say that the American empire has accumulated enough misdeeds of its own to merit a reaction. Xi, in particular – an avid reader of history books (the Chinese translation of Peter Frankopan's *The Silk Roads* reportedly among them) believes in the destiny of China. He thinks that China's time has come, after the 'Century of Humiliation' at the hands of western powers. Eighty years on from the Second World War, Xi now says that China's rise to global leadership is "unstoppable".

So back to these images of empire: Jahangir and Abbas, Modi and Xi. Some would say that they represent wish fulfilment: a rebuke to what President Xi's baleful friend Putin calls "outdated Eurocentric and Euro-Atlantic models". But behind the hugs and the photo ops, behind that amazing piece of diplomatic grandstanding in the giant military parade in Beijing celebrating China's role in the Second World War, perhaps there is more than that: a vision of the future, uncomfortable though it may be to us in the west.

As for Jahangir's globe, the painting was a dream. But there are few images from the past that more powerfully distil what might have been. And now, as Shakespeare put it, "the whirligig of time brings in his revenges". H

Michael Wood is professor of public history at the University of Manchester. He has presented numerous BBC series. His books include *The Story of China* (Simon & Schuster, 2021). You'll find him on X at *MichaelWoodMV*



FRAN MONKS/ALAMY

ADVERTISEMENT FEATURE

Creativity in captivity

TO MARK THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE END OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR, BRITISH RED CROSS MUSEUM CURATOR MEHZEBIN ADAM-SUTER UNCOVERS THE ACTS OF ENDURANCE THAT HELPED THOSE IN CAPTIVITY SURVIVE UNTIL LIBERATION

Did you know the British Red Cross supported Allied prisoners of war (POWs) and civilian internees during the Second World War? Throughout the conflict, it distributed food, clothing, medical equipment, books, games and sports equipment worldwide – and this aid, including help with repatriations, continued long after VE Day.

Of all these services, packing and dispatching food parcels was the most crucial, and a true lifeline for many. By 1944, around 2,700 people worked in the food-packing centres, with more than 80 per cent giving their time as unpaid volunteers. By the end of the war, almost 20 million parcels had been sent overseas.

FROM TRASH TO TREASURE

For those in captivity, these parcels became more than nourishment. Prisoners and internees crafted practical tools and intricate works of art from whatever they could salvage, including tin cans and cardboard.

In the Liebenau Internment Camp in Germany for instance, female internees transformed scraps of fabric and string from food parcels into both useful and decorative objects, such as children's shoe soles and storage boxes. These items not only highlight the resilience, resourcefulness and creativity of those facing adversity, but also serve as a reminder of the ingenuity displayed in the harshest circumstances.

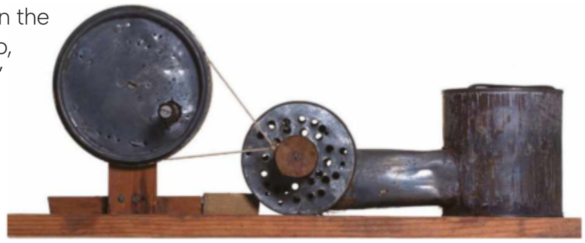
INGENIOUS INVENTIONS

Some prisoners even produced handmade heaters, known as 'blowers' or 'brewing machines', which were used to brew tea or heat food. Jack Stedman, a British POW held in Italy, built one using tins sent by the British Red Cross – and a replica he constructed decades later is displayed in the Museum today.

"I thoroughly enjoyed building the blower again," said Jack. "It certainly made me realise how much patience we had in the camps! There was nothing else to do, but it proved a very efficient heater."

THREADS OF SURVIVAL

Another example is the Changi quilt, which was made up of 66 patchwork squares and embroidered by the women in Changi Jail, Singapore, to ease boredom and boost morale. Those whose husbands and male relatives were held separately also stitched symbols into quilts to communicate; for many men, this brought the first news that their loved ones had survived.



STEP INTO HISTORY

Want to discover more inspiring stories and inventions from the Second World War? Start planning your visit to the British Red Cross Museum now at **redcross.org.uk/museum**

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HIDDEN HISTORIES

KAVITA PURI on the importance of the stories of South Asians in Britain

“They arrived with just £3. Imagine starting a new life with so little”

Kavita Puri is a journalist and broadcaster for BBC Radio 4. Her latest BBC Sounds series is *The History Podcast: The Second Map.* She is the author of *Partition Voices: Untold British Stories* (Bloomsbury, 2019)

I REMEMBER LOOKING IN THE BBC ARCHIVES for stories of the first arrivals of South Asians in the postwar years, and being surprised at how little programming had been made documenting the experiences of my parents' generation. That was well over 10 years ago now. From then on, I began to record testimonies of people who came to the UK from South Asia after the Second World War for my Radio 4 series *Three Pounds in My Pocket*. The title of that programme was inspired by the fact that, for years after the war, strict currency controls dictated that those arriving from India could not bring more than £3 into the UK. Imagine starting a new life in a new country with so little.

Over time, I went on to record accounts from the descendants of that three-pound generation, hearing about their struggles and achievements. Many of the people I first interviewed – including my father – are no longer with us. I feel so grateful that I was able to capture their stories: memories of what these former subjects of the Raj had imagined Britain to be, what it was actually like when they arrived, how they were received and, so many decades on, where they now felt 'home' was.

Asians comprise the largest minority ethnic group in Britain today, yet it's always struck me how little the history of South Asians in Britain is known – among South Asians themselves as well as across the country as a whole. It's noticeable that in 2025 there is still no central British South Asian cultural archive, and that South Asian Heritage Month is only in its sixth year.

South Asians have had a presence in Britain for centuries, as Rozina Visram's seminal 2002 book *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* discusses. The first such settlers came as sailors and servants, brought by the East India Company. In time, students, ayahs (nursemaids), princes and professionals arrived. In 1892, Dadabhai Naoroji was elected as Liberal member of parliament for Finsbury Central, becoming the first MP of South Asian heritage. He supported free education, votes for women and home rule for Ireland, and campaigned for representation for Indians in the government of India.

Large-scale immigration from the subcontinent started after the 1948 Nationality Act was passed. It conferred on subjects of British colonies and the Commonwealth the right to settle in the UK. But the South Asian experience has not been as well documented as that of those coming from the Caribbean. Dr Florian Stadtler, co-author of *Asian Britain: A Photographic History* (2013), believes one of the reasons is because “there was no Windrush moment”. But it could also be because the term 'South Asian' encompasses so many people from different places on the Indian subcontinent, with their own distinct regional histories, languages, cultures.

An important new digital hub has just launched. South Asian Britain: Connecting Histories (*southasianbritain.org*) aims to explore the complexity of this longer story. It discusses themes ranging from family and politics to multiple migrations and resistance, as well as education and intellectual life. There are some wonderful oral testimonies. Bari Chohan, for example, explains how some of his family came to Britain in the 1870s, setting up homeopathic clinics across the country. His great-uncle married a nurse, and they were one of the first mixed-race couples in north-east England. His father, who was in England at the outbreak of the Second World War, fought with the British Army. There's so much history in that one family's story.

Understanding and acknowledging this long presence of South Asians in Britain is important. As identity in politics comes to the fore once again, and questions are asked about who is British and who belongs here, these stories take on a greater significance. South Asians have lived in, contributed to, fought and died for Britain. It's time this is more widely recognised.

A boy of South Asian heritage plays on the sandy shore of the Thames, 1939. By then, people from the subcontinent had been in Britain for centuries

GETTY IMAGES

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LETTERS

LETTER OF THE MONTH

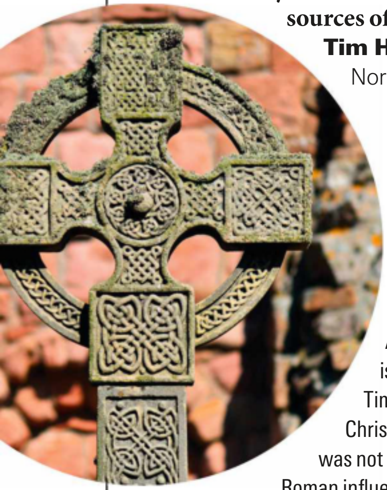
Faith and flexibility

I greatly enjoyed your interview with Alice Roberts about her new book *Domination*, (*Books Interview*, September), and its argument that the church was essentially Rome rebadged, with its structures and ambitions intact. I have now read the book as well, but was disappointed that neither seemed to fully recognise that Christianity's spread in Europe was not purely a Roman project.

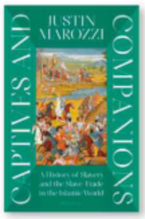
Celtic Christians, for example, nurtured the faith organically, often in spite of Roman opposition. Christianity might have thrived independently without imperial support, although it may have emerged in a more fragmented and less organised form – something the post-Reformation era has shown to be possible. These parallel movements remind us that the story of Christianity in Europe is as much about grassroots resilience as it is about imperial adoption and the emphasis on power and wealth.

One can be sceptical about the political motives of Rome while still embracing the spiritual core of Christianity. The book's thesis is a valuable lens through which to view the topic – but it is equally important to remember Christianity's many other, often overlooked, sources of vitality.

Tim Hunter, North Yorkshire



A Celtic cross on the island of Lindisfarne. Tim Hunter argues that Christianity's flourishing was not merely the result of Roman influence



We reward the Letter of the Month writer with a copy of a new book. This issue, that's **Captives and Companions: A History of Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Islamic World** by Justin Marozzi. Read our review on page 72

The beginning of the end?

In the October issue's *Letters*, Colin Bullen stated that the surrender of Japan in the Second World War was mainly due to the nuclear raids on 6 and 9 August 1945. Dramatic though the raids were, it would hardly have persuaded a diehard Japanese war cabinet to surrender, since the destruction of 66 major Japanese towns and cities by conventional US air raids had failed to do so. There was precious little 'conventional' about those air raids, in that they were carried out using napalm bombs whose effects upon civilians were horrific and accounted for more than 100,000 deaths in one raid on Tokyo.

At Yalta in February 1945, Stalin agreed to declare war on Japan within three months of VE Day, and did so on 8 August. Soviet forces captured areas including Manchuria, North Korea, parts of China, and the Kuril Islands. Emperor Hirohito had hoped that the USSR would seek from the western allies more favourable terms than unconditional surrender. When he realised that wasn't going to happen – and knowing that Russian occupation would be very unfavourable – he promptly surrendered on 15 August. The USSR continued its offensive and the surrender was not formally ratified until 2 September, at which it was one of the signatories.

Donald Bristo, King's Lynn

In defence of Pepys

I'm writing in defence of Samuel Pepys, having read Guy de la Bédoyère's recent article (September). Yes, Pepys was certainly a philanderer, but marital fidelity was not a virtue highly prized in Restoration England: Charles II and his court were not renowned for moral rectitude, for instance, and the cuckold husband was a recurring theme in Restoration comedy.

Pepys does appear to have loved his wife, Elizabeth, although often treated her with contempt or even cruelty. However, it was a hard and morganatic age in which women were regarded largely as possessions. They had no rights, and men were free to use them as they wished. Pepys's contemporaries would have seen nothing wrong in the domestic abuse. Wife beating was, sadly, an accepted part of marriage, and remained so for many centuries afterwards. Pepys was known to thrash his servants, as most people did – and again, this was a common practice until a much later date.

We cannot truly comprehend the world Pepys inhabited, although we glimpse it in his diary: the horrors of the plague and the Great Fire; the threat of a Dutch fleet, poised to invade. Fear, we understand, but other states of mind elude us completely.

To judge Pepys by the standards of our more enlightened times is unfair. He was flawed, but he was also a fascinating, deeply complex and talented man.

Jill Stewart-Rattray, Tavistock

Pistol dispute

I had to smile after reading the letter in your July issue headed 'Information War' about 'facts' on the board at a US Revolutionary battle site. At one of the museums I visited during my last trip to the US there were some flintlock pistols captioned as 'Green River' pistols. This was apparently because they bore the mark 'GR', indicating they were

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ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

The 'Big Three' – Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin – at 1945's Yalta Conference. Donald Bristo points to the summit's importance to Japan's surrender

made in the Green River gun factory. I pointed out to museum staff that, in fact, the weapons were captured British pistols, as the 'GR' came from the mark 'George Rex'.

I could tell that the staff thought I had a cheek to point out an 'error'. I didn't argue, but it's not the first time I've noticed a reluctance to accept new facts over old.

Paul Dew, Hillingdon

Tapestry tourists

The mostly enthusiastic views of your panel of 10 historians, and the article by the ever-effervescent Michael Wood, had me in stitches with their gushing anticipation of the sight in London of the Bayeux Tapestry (*Conversation*, September).

For those unable to wait, or unable to get to the British Museum to see it in 2026 or 2027, you could always see a fine replica Bayeux Tapestry in Reading (not mentioned by your experts). Made in England by the ladies of Leek in Staffordshire, it adorns the wall of the Reading Museum. Aside from this beautiful work, visitors to Reading can see many other historic places including an abbey, a Banksy, the classroom of Jane Austen, and loads more.

Bill Patey, Reading

Sections of the replica Bayeux Tapestry on display at Reading Museum – just one of the town's many historical attractions praised by Bill Patey

Correction

In October's *Letters*, we incorrectly captioned a photo of the boxers Thomas 'Pedlar' Palmer and Ted 'Kid' Lewis. As Moira Walshe, author of the original letter, has pointed out, Palmer was actually on the left of the image, with Lewis on the right.

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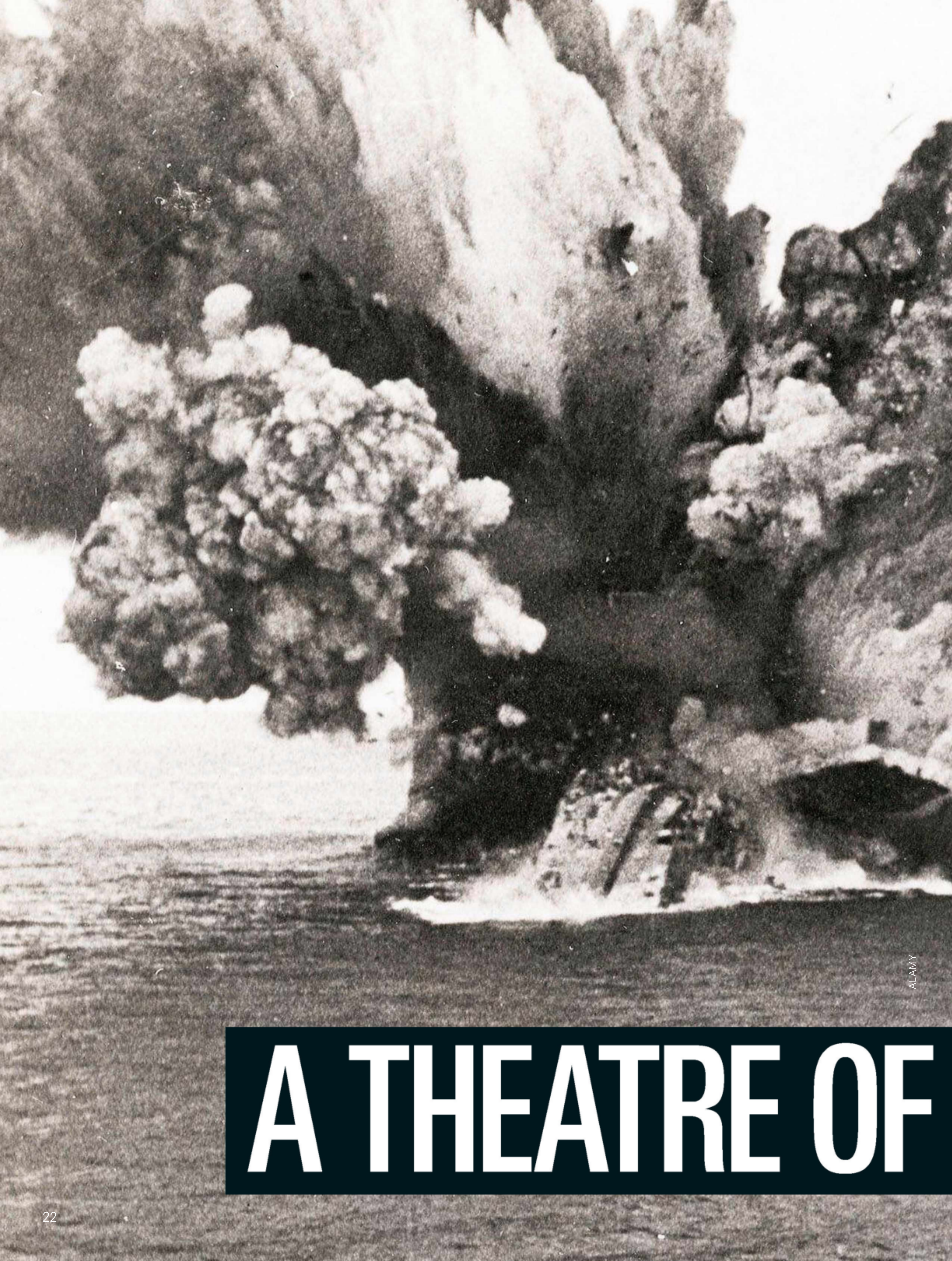

ALAMY

A THEATRE OF

CRUEL SEA
HMS *Barham* explodes following a U-boat attack off Egypt in 1941, with the loss of more than 860 men. From 1942, the German leadership effectively banned U-boat crews from rescuing survivors

HATE?

Did German U-boats conduct a 'clean' campaign during the Second World War? Or were they guilty of routinely murdering survivors in the water? **Roger Moorhouse** weighs the evidence

HOW THE ALLIES TURNED THE TIDE
A timeline of the war against the U-boats

Survivors are brought ashore following the sinking of the SS *Athenia*

U-boat crew assist survivors of RMS *Laconia* before themselves coming under attack from a US bomber

3 September 1939
The British liner SS *Athenia* is sunk by *U-30* just hours after Britain had declared war on Germany, marking the start of the Battle of the Atlantic

14 October 1939
U-47 penetrates Scapa Flow and sinks the battleship *Royal Oak*, killing 833, shocking the Royal Navy and boosting German morale

June 1940
Following France's fall, Germany gains Atlantic U-boat bases at Lorient, Brest and elsewhere. This dramatically extends U-boat reach into the Atlantic and intensifies Allied shipping losses

March–June 1941
U-boats enjoy high success against British shipping, aided by poor Allied convoy tactics and limited air cover, marking their most effective early-war period

12 September 1941
U-156 sinks RMS *Laconia* carrying civilians and PoWs. After surfacing to help survivors, the U-boat is attacked by US aircraft. This prompts the Germans to introduce the Laconia Order, forbidding the rescue of survivors

On the night of 13 March 1944, the Greek-registered steamship *SS Peleus* was en route from Freetown to Buenos Aires when she was hit amidships by two torpedoes, launched by a German U-boat, *U-852*. The twin-masted merchantman, of around 5,000 tons, swiftly began to sink, her internal bulkheads ruptured by the detonations. Within three minutes, the *Peleus* disappeared below the surface, leaving the surviving members of her 39-strong crew clinging to rafts and flotsam in the darkness.

As sinkings go during the naval war, it was unremarkable, one might even say routine. But what followed would set it apart. Soon after, *U-852* surfaced close to the debris field, hoping to identify her prey and glean some information. Her captain, 27-year-old Kapitänleutnant Heinz-Wilhelm Eck, ordered one of his men – who spoke some English – to come up to the bow to question one of the survivors. After learning the identity of his target, Eck gave the order for *U-852* to move away. But then he changed his mind.

Eck was nervous. Prior to his departure from port, he had been given a lecture from his superiors on the perils of passing through the Atlantic Narrows, around Ascension, and was told that all four of the previous patrols undertaken by his predecessors had ended with the vessels being sunk. Due to the heightened risk of air attack he was urged to take every precaution to avoid being spotted by enemy aircraft. Even debris from a sinking, it was stressed, could give away his position.

Calculating that he could be only some 200 miles away by daybreak, when the wreckage of the *Peleus* would doubtless be spotted, he made the decision to attempt to destroy the debris. He brought a party of his men up on deck and ordered them to open fire on the rafts and other debris with machine guns. In the moonless night, they were largely firing blind, but the operation continued for hours, with grenades being thrown and *U-852's* anti-aircraft gun even being brought to bear.

The number killed by these actions is unknown, but only four members of the *Peleus'* crew – three Greeks and a Briton – survived among the wreckage. Three of them would endure until they were finally picked up by a Portuguese steamer, more than a month later.

A bloody exception

It is often assumed that the brutal treatment of the survivors of the *Peleus* was somehow the norm: that U-boat crews thought little of brutalising, even of murdering, their victims. That certainly was the assumption of Doris Hawkins, a young British nurse who was torpedoed and then picked up by a U-boat in 1941. "We had heard so many atrocity stories," she later wrote. "We feared a shower of machine gun bullets."

Bearing in mind the atrocities that were routinely committed by German forces elsewhere in the war – especially in eastern Europe – this assumption is entirely understandable. But, if the written records are to be believed, it is also entirely wrong. The example of the *Peleus* was very much the exception. Indeed, it was the only documented example of a U-boat action in the Second World War resulting in a war crime.

Sceptical readers might question this

It has often been assumed that U-boat crews thought little of brutalising their victims

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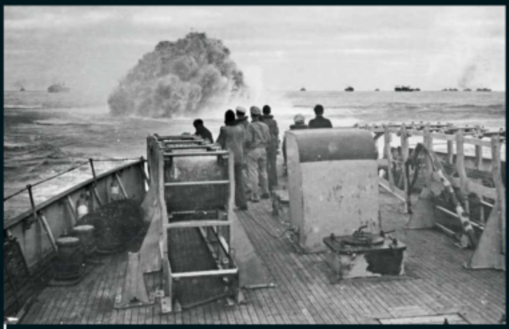
A U-boat patrols the Atlantic in 1941, a year that saw an escalation of 'wolfpack' attacks on Allied shipping

October 1941

German U-boats operate in coordinated 'wolfpacks' to attack convoys, reaching peak effectiveness in the mid-Atlantic and causing severe shipping losses, despite increased Allied defences

December 1941

Following Pearl Harbor, U-boats begin Operation Drumbeat, targeting unprepared US coastal shipping. This results in catastrophic losses early in 1942



Crew aboard a US coastguard vessel in the Atlantic watch the sinking of *U-175*, April 1943

May 1943

In what the Germans will dub 'Black May', the Allies turn the tide with improved radar, codebreaking and air cover. U-boat losses spike dramatically, forcing Germany to temporarily withdraw many boats from the Atlantic

Planes of the RAF Coastal Command. Allied air superiority tightened the screw further on the 'wolfpacks'

June 1944

U-boats fail to disrupt Allied landings in Normandy. With air superiority, improved technology and better escorts, the Allies dominate the Atlantic, further reducing U-boat effectiveness

5 May 1945

Admiral Dönitz orders all remaining U-boats to surrender. More than 150 comply, marking the official end of the U-boat war and the wider naval conflict in Europe

assertion – and rightly so. For one thing, it is well known that Hitler was instinctively secretive and had a preference for issuing verbal rather than written orders when dealing with sensitive matters.

Consequently, at the Nuremberg trials, the prosecution was keen to assert that the available documentary record of the U-boat war was somehow incomplete, or that mendacious amendments could have been made. More than that, given the brutality with which most branches of the German armed forces conducted their war, is it perhaps naïve to imagine that the men of the Kriegsmarine somehow managed to resist both the heat of the moment – and the bloodthirsty rhetoric of their superiors – and refrained from straying into barbarism?

Licence to kill?

At Nuremburg, Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz, the erstwhile commander of U-boat forces, rejected robustly the claims that the Germans had somehow covered up atrocities committed during the war at sea. Yet the testimony of Korvettenkapitän Karl-Heinz Moehle, former commander of the 5th U-boat Flotilla, suggested that the culture within the U-boat arm may have been less 'clean' than Dönitz was willing to admit.

Moehle's testimony centred around the so-called Laconia Order, Dönitz's instruction to his crews, issued in 1942, to refrain from assisting shipwrecked crewmen. When he asked his superiors about the implications of the order, Moehle was told that it was a coded instruction to kill survivors. And that's how he passed it on to his officers, albeit with the caveat that each individual commander had to act according to his own conscience.

It is quite possible, then, that there were other atrocities committed by U-boat crews against stricken merchant crewmen, but that circumstances conspired to consign them to oblivion. Perhaps there were no survivors to tell the tale, or the perpetrators were themselves sunk later in their patrol. Absence of evidence, then, should not be confused with evidence of absence.

Nonetheless, it is striking that so few examples of atrocities committed by U-boat crews have come to light. And this should prompt the curious to seek to understand why. The reasons why commanders might have resisted the urge to kill survivors – assuming they felt it at all – would have been multi-layered and would doubtless have evolved with time. But a few explanatory factors are worth bearing in mind.

Heinz-Wilhelm Eck (left), commander of *U-852*, is tried for war crimes, October 1945. The following month he was executed by firing squad

For one thing, the typical U-boat – such as the Type VII – was small and cramped. With its crew of around 50, it had no space to accommodate survivors and only limited capacity to offer material assistance. Bearing that in mind, it is remarkable how often, in the opening phase of the war, U-boat crews assisted the surviving crewmen from the ships that they had sunk, offering food, cigarettes, blankets and a compass bearing.

In the most astonishing example, the commander of *U-35* opted to take the 28 surviving crewmen of

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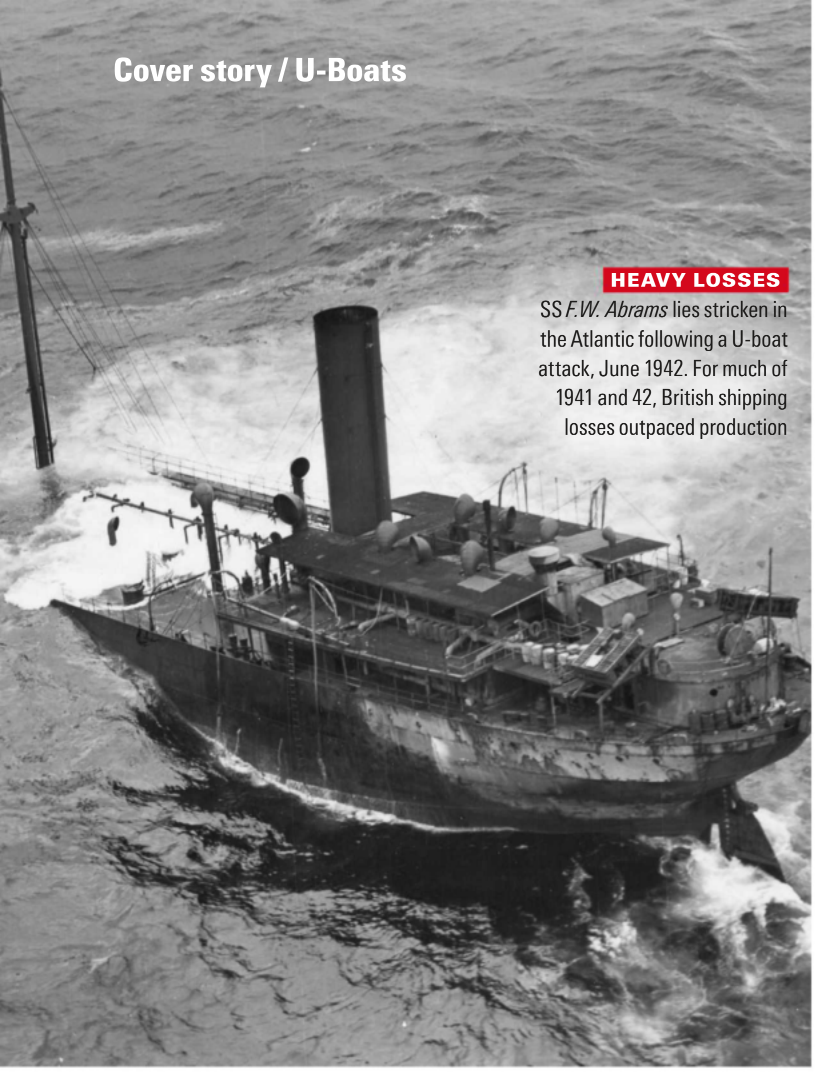
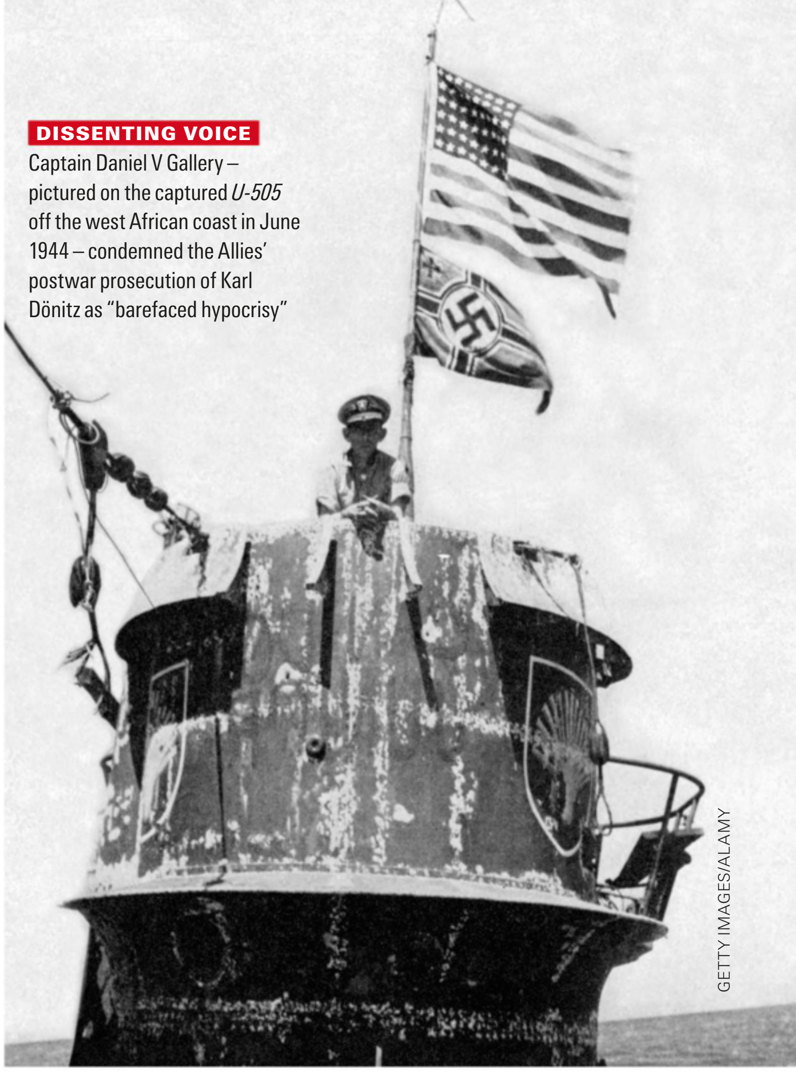


HEAVY LOSSES

SS *F.W. Abrams* lies stricken in the Atlantic following a U-boat attack, June 1942. For much of 1941 and 42, British shipping losses outpaced production



DISSENTING VOICE

Captain Daniel V Gallery – pictured on the captured *U-505* off the west African coast in June 1944 – condemned the Allies' postwar prosecution of Karl Dönitz as "barefaced hypocrisy"

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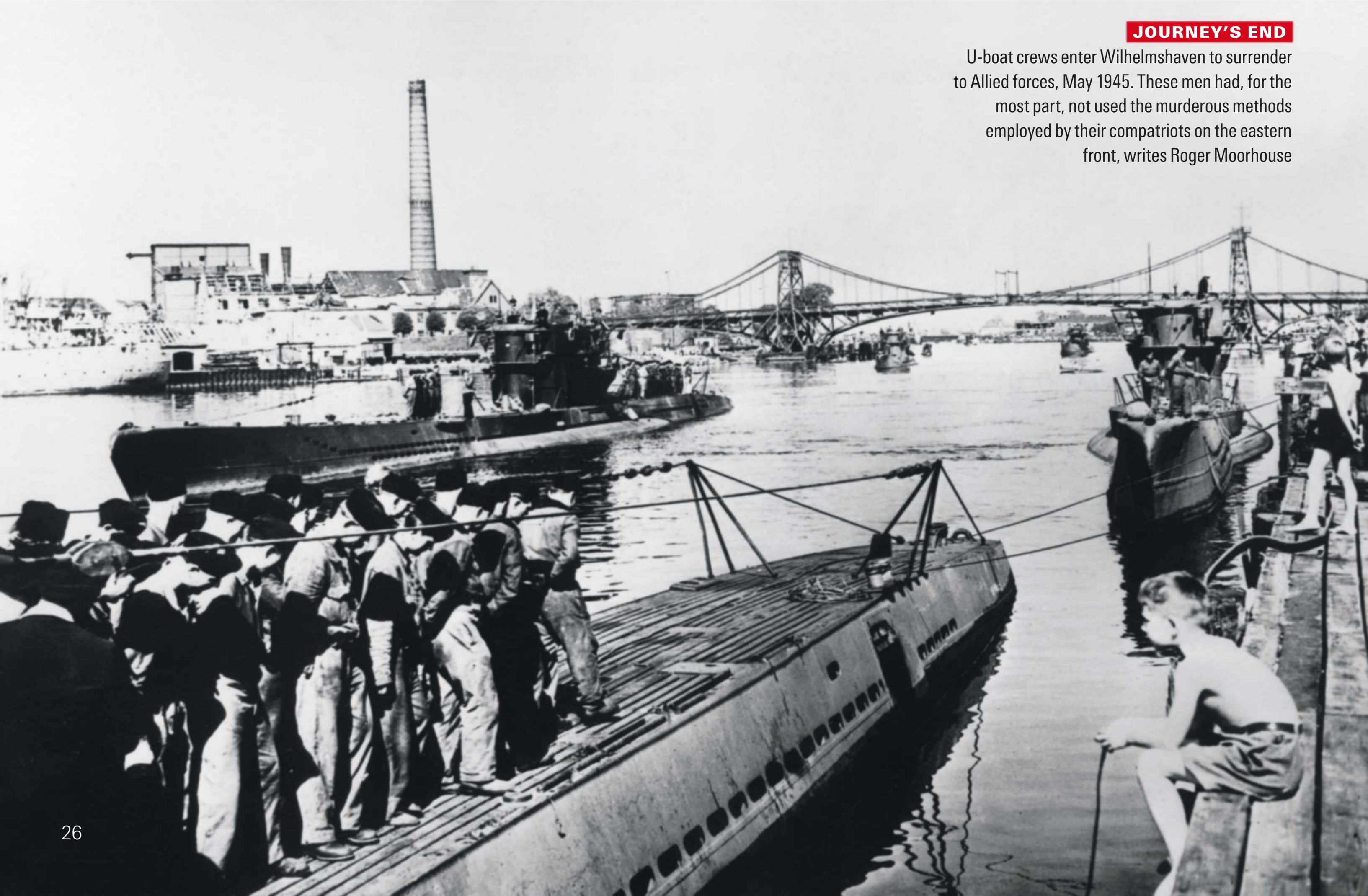

JOURNEY'S END

U-boat crews enter Wilhelmshaven to surrender to Allied forces, May 1945. These men had, for the most part, not used the murderous methods employed by their compatriots on the eastern front, writes Roger Moorhouse

The battle for survival Roger Moorhouse will be discussing the U-boats' assault on Allied shipping on our podcast: *historyextra.com/podcast*

the Greek-registered *Diamantis* aboard his submarine and sailed more than 30 hours to the beach at Ventry, in western Ireland, where they were then ferried ashore in a dinghy.

Such chivalrous actions could scarcely survive in the age of total war, of course, and after the Laconia Order, all such humanitarian impulses were formally banned by the German naval command. As a result, after the initial phase of the war, contact with survivors was effectively forbidden. By mid-1942, then – aside from a brief interrogation to confirm the identity of the sunk vessel – U-boats tended to avoid survivors altogether.

The culture within the U-boat arm is also worth consideration. One should be wary of underestimating the influence of ideology in any arm of the Nazi state, but it is notable that even contemporaries considered that the Kriegsmarine was less ideologically aligned with Nazism than other branches of the armed forces. Hitler himself is said to have complained that he had "a Nazi air force, a Prussian army and a Christian navy".

That quotation, though apocryphal, may nonetheless have had the ring of truth. Crewman Hans Goebeler, aboard *U-505*, recalled that – on his boat at least – ideology simply didn't seem to matter: "Who were the Nazis aboard our submarine?" he asked: "I never met one. We were identical to the sailors from every nation who faced the hazards of war and the sea during those years. Party members or not, we performed our duties with professionalism and honour."

Every boat would have had a cross-section of German society aboard, from fervent Nazis to the apolitical and even those who opposed the regime. Yet the question of how far the U-boat arm was indoctrinated is an interesting and complex one.

Dönitz himself was a convinced Nazi, who was fiercely loyal to Hitler, and a few of his commanders shared that enthusiasm. But active indoctrination of the U-boat arm appears to have been limited. While other branches of the German armed forces were increasingly subjected to ideological control as the war progressed, this was simply not the case for the navy.

Despite his own enthusiasm for Nazism, Dönitz appears to have stopped short of establishing genuine ideological oversight over his men. The office responsible for indoctrination within the navy, for instance, was staffed largely by men without Nazi backgrounds and – given that they were also not permitted to 'ride along' on patrol – they were in any case prevented from exerting any real influence over operational units.

This doesn't mean that the U-boat arm was some sort of haven for anti-Nazi thinking or oppositional attitudes. It was not. The Kriegsmarine was far from apolitical, but its leaders held the view that its coordination to Nazi goals was self-evident, a natural corollary to the patriotism and sense of duty that were essential components of their collective identity. Dönitz held the attempts to enforce ideological conformity at arm's length, not because he disagreed or was minded to resist, but because he considered such measures to be an unnecessary imposition. The Kriegsmarine, he believed, was already wholly on side.

We should also keep in mind that there was no single 'way of war' practised by the forces of the Third Reich in the Second World War. The murderous methods deployed on the eastern front, for instance, were only rarely in evidence in the west, while the war in the desert, lacking an ideological dimension, tended to be similarly unsullied by atrocities. These differences in behaviour by German forces were not the result of whim or happenstance. Rather, they were contingent on the nature of the enemy and whether Nazi ideology deemed them to be civilised and worthy of respect – as in the west – or to be subhumans slated for extermination, as in the east.

The available evidence shows that the naval war, and the submarine war in particular, cleaved more to that western model than to anything else. It is hard to escape the conclusion that the U-boat war does indeed appear to have been the 'cleanest' of the theatres of the European conflict, with many more instances of the old fashioned 'solidarity of the sea' in evidence than there were examples of atrocities.

Moral outrage

Such logic cut little ice with the judges at Nuremberg, of course, as Dönitz was found guilty on two of the three charges against him and was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment. As the former commander of the Kriegsmarine, and Hitler's successor as Reich President, he deserved neither leniency nor sympathy. And, in the first flush of moral outrage over the crimes of Nazism, the Nuremberg judges were inclined towards the view that all Germans were Nazis and that everything that German forces had done was evidence of Nazi barbarism.

Nonetheless, it was a verdict that provoked no little controversy, even from some senior Allied naval officers. US Admiral Daniel V Gallery – who had spent most of the war hunting U-boats – was especially vociferous in his condemnation. Dönitz's trial, he said, was an "outstanding example of barefaced hypocrisy", and his conviction was "an insult to our own submariners". "If the old gentleman ever gets out of jail," he wrote, "I hope I never meet him. I would have trouble looking him in the eye. The only crime he committed was the crime of almost beating us in a bloody but 'legal' fight."

He had a point. Dönitz's defence at Nuremberg – brilliantly conducted by his lawyer, Otto Kranzbühler – had turned largely on the apparent hypocrisies of the Allies' accusations, given that they, too, had effectively been carrying out unrestricted submarine warfare for most of the war. To hammer home the point, Kranzbühler had produced an affidavit from Admiral Chester Nimitz, wartime commander-in-chief of the US Pacific Fleet, which asserted that it had been customary for US submarines to attack Japanese merchant ships without warning, and that 'general principles' did not permit US submarines to rescue enemy survivors. In short, Nimitz's testimony implied that the US Navy had conducted its submarine war precisely as Dönitz claimed to have conducted his.

The truth on this point was more damning than Kranzbühler could have known. Naval records released in the

Admiral Karl Dönitz (left) claimed that the U-boats waged a 'clean' war. But was he being economical with the truth?

Hitler is said to have complained that he had "a Nazi air force, a Prussian army and a Christian navy"

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BRITAIN'S NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE

How U-boats drove a nation to the brink of economic strangulation

During the early years of the Second World War, Britain came perilously close to defeat in the Battle of the Atlantic – a prolonged struggle against German U-boats aiming to sever the maritime lifelines sustaining Britain. As an island nation dependent on imports for food, fuel and war materiel, Britain faced an existential threat from the Kriegsmarine's submarine campaign.

Between 1939 and 1945, German U-boats sank more than 2,700 Allied merchant ships, totalling approximately 14.5 million gross tons. The most dangerous period came in 1942, when 1,160 ships were lost to U-boats– more than 6.2 million tons – much of it along the poorly defended US coast during Operation Drumbeat.

Britain's shipping losses outpaced production for much of 1941–42, and food rationing became more severe. At one point, Britain had only six weeks' worth of grain reserves. Winston Churchill later wrote that the U-boat threat was the only thing that truly frightened him during the war.

The crisis peaked in early 1943, when monthly merchant shipping losses reached around 700,000 tons. German Admiral Karl Dönitz believed victory was within reach, committing more than 100 U-boats to mid-Atlantic 'wolfpack' operations.

However, from May 1943 – dubbed 'Black May' by the Germans – the tide turned. Allied advances in radar, sonar, Ultra intelligence, long-range patrol aircraft and escort carriers decimated U-boat fleets. That month alone, the Germans lost 41 U-boats, forcing a temporary withdrawal from the Atlantic.

Though never completely severed, Britain's shipping routes were strained to their limits. Without technological breakthroughs, convoy reforms and American shipbuilding – producing Liberty ships faster than U-boats could sink them – Britain might have been economically strangled into submission.

In the end, the U-boat campaign claimed the lives of more than 30,000 Allied seamen. But it failed to deliver a knockout blow.

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Women queue for vegetables in Gloucestershire, 1941. By now, Britain's shipping routes were strained to their limits

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1960s would reveal that the crew of the American submarine USS *Wahoo* had themselves participated in an action not unlike that involving the *Peleus*. In January 1943, the *Wahoo* sank the 5,000-ton Japanese troopship *Buyo Maru*, north of Papua New Guinea, which had been carrying Japanese soldiers and nearly 500 PoWs from the British Indian army. In the aftermath, as Japanese and Indian survivors bobbed around some 20 lifeboats, the crew of the *Wahoo* opened fire with machine guns. "We proceeded to have a field day," said the captain, Lt Commander Dudley Morton.

Biological hatred

In his defence, Morton claimed that he was returning fire, but this is disputed. Some of his crew were even shocked by his evident "biological hatred" of the enemy. Whatever justification he felt he had, Morton's attack on the *Buyo Maru* cost the lives of some 87 Japanese soldiers and more than 195 Indians. His after-action report included the shooting, but he faced no punishment, and the incident was suppressed by his navy superiors. In postwar narratives, the example of the *Buyo Maru* was quietly forgotten, while that of the *Peleus* would be held up as symbolic of Nazi brutality.

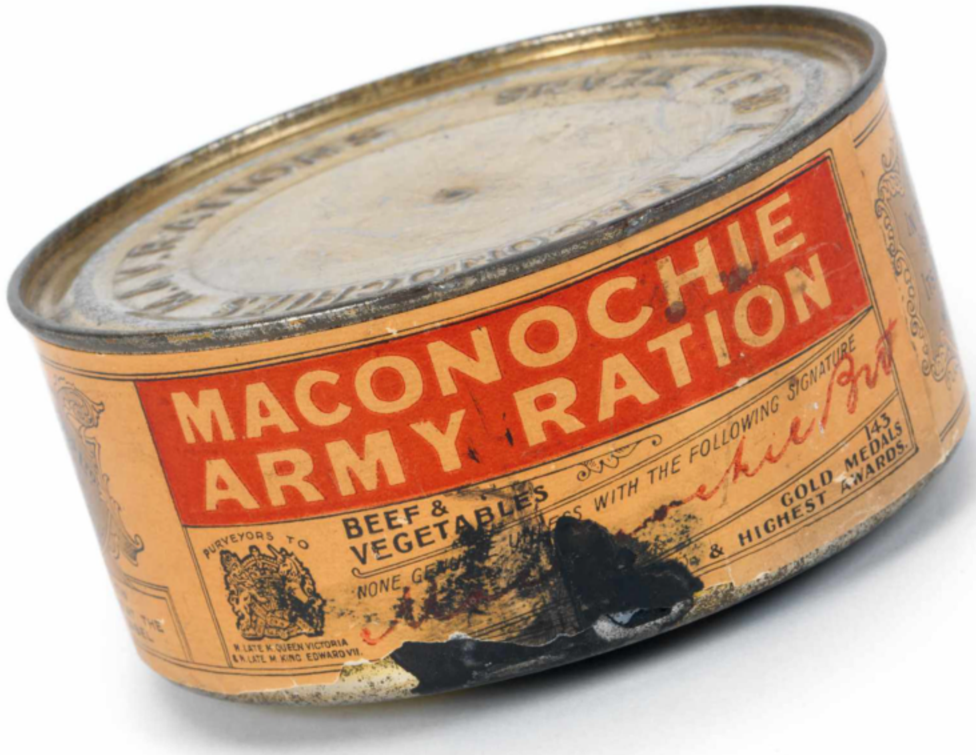
This is not a game of moral equivalence. It would be wrong to draw from a few isolated cases the false conclusion that the Allies and Axis were morally indistinguishable. The broader war aims mattered. However 'clean' the U-boat campaign may have been, it was serving a regime synonymous with evil. Conversely, even when the Allies faltered morally, their cause – resisting tyranny – remained just.

The point, rather, is to challenge the lazy assumption that German U-boat crews were sadistic murderers. The *Peleus* atrocity was very real, but it was an outlier. U-boats dealt devastating blows to Allied shipping and caused enormous loss of life, but there was only one confirmed instance of the deliberate killing of survivors.

The murder of the *Peleus* survivors was not a feature of the U-boat war. It was a chilling, singular exception. H

A Japanese ship sinks in 1942 after being attacked by USS *Wahoo*. The American sub would later be involved in one of the most controversial incidents of the war at sea

Roger Moorhouse is a historian and author. His latest book, *Wolfpack: Inside Hitler's U-boat War*, is published by William Collins in October



Maconochie tinned ration, © IWM EPH 4379

I am a trench master chef

I'm a beef and vegetable stew shipped in the thousands to British Army soldiers in the trenches of the Western Front during the First World War. Daily rations were meant to include fresh or frozen meat, but many meals would have consisted of tinned food, like me, a Maconochie Army ration.

As part of a soldier's daily wartime diet, I was only considered edible if mixed with something else. According to soldiers in the trenches, I was "edible" when warm, but "a man-killer" when eaten cold. Maybe it was the congealed layer of fat which formed on top of me, the gristly pieces of beef, or the thin, watery gravy that put the soldiers off.

Another part of a soldier's diet were Army biscuits – very hard, thick slabs which notoriously could break a soldier's teeth unless soaked in tea or water. A typical way of making them more edible was to grind or crumble them and add water to make a paste which could be added to stew like me.

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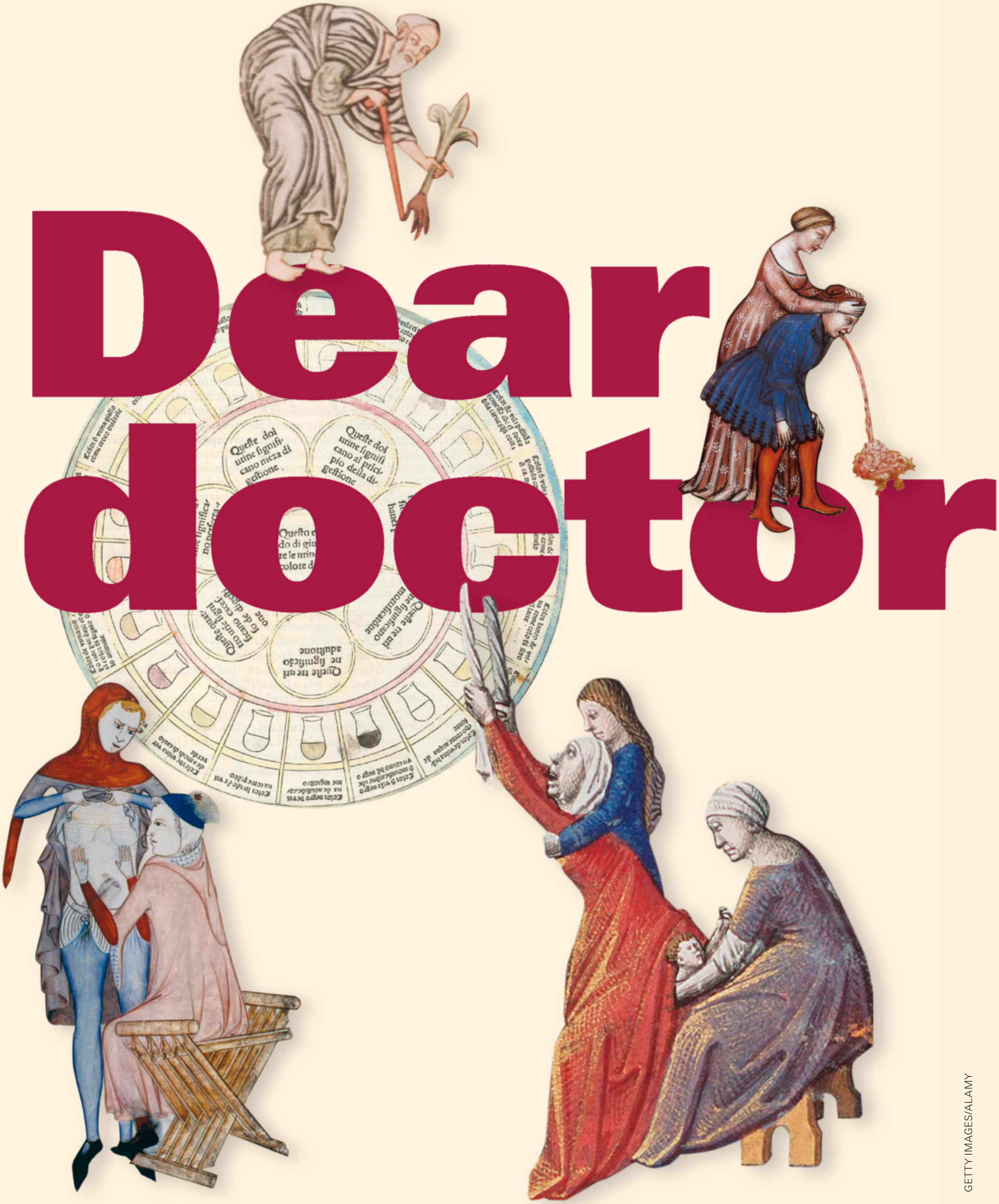
Dear doctor



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Kill or cure? Discover the efficacy – or perils – of 10 medieval medical remedies in an online article: *historyextra.com/kill-or-cure*

What did medieval physicians prescribe for stomach ache? And could weasels' testicles really help you conceive? **James Freeman** delves into the sources to find eight curious cures from the Middle Ages

...my urine has turned black!

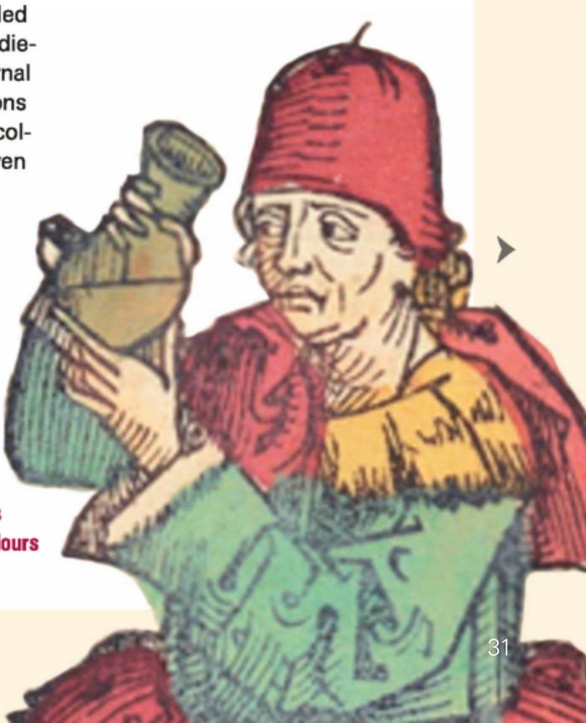
What does your wee say about your health? Well, plenty – but perhaps not in quite the way medieval physicians understood it. Before the in-depth study of anatomy and physiology, establishing the causes of symptoms relied on theories that today seem primitive or foolish. However, they were often based on long-established ideas about the body and its function.

Medieval treatises on uroscopy – the study of urine – identified up to 20 colours, each indicating certain diseases. Many texts on this subject were accompanied by drawings of glass flasks filled with liquid coloured with an appropriate pigment. These might be arranged in a circular shape with descriptive labels (as shown far left), helping readers to memorise the key diagnostic details. Perhaps unsurprisingly, black was the worst possible colour, and was generally agreed to indicate imminent death.

Why was urine so significant? Because of prohibitions against opening the body (which extended to postmortem dissections), medieval doctors were reliant on external indicators. This included variations in a patient's pulse but also the colour, texture, layers, smell and even taste of their urine.

The doctor's role was to understand a patient's nature: specifically, the four fluids or 'humours' inside the human body. In the treatise *De Natura Hominis* ('On the Nature of Man'), by the ancient Greek physician Hippocrates (c460–c375 BC) or his pupil Polybus, it was determined that there were four such humours: blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile. Disease was caused by imbalances in these humours, or when they became 'corrupted' or concentrated in a part of the body.

This theory was developed further by Galen of Pergamon (c129–c216), who likened digestion to the cooking process: food was converted into life-giving liquid, the humours were generated by the vital organs, and waste products – including urine – were expelled. Examining urine could therefore inform the physician about the state of a patient's digestion and of any possible humoural imbalance and the disease that might result from it.



An Italian physician examines a urine sample in a 15th-century woodcut. Medieval treatises connected diseases with defined urine colours

…I've got an excruciating pain in my bottom

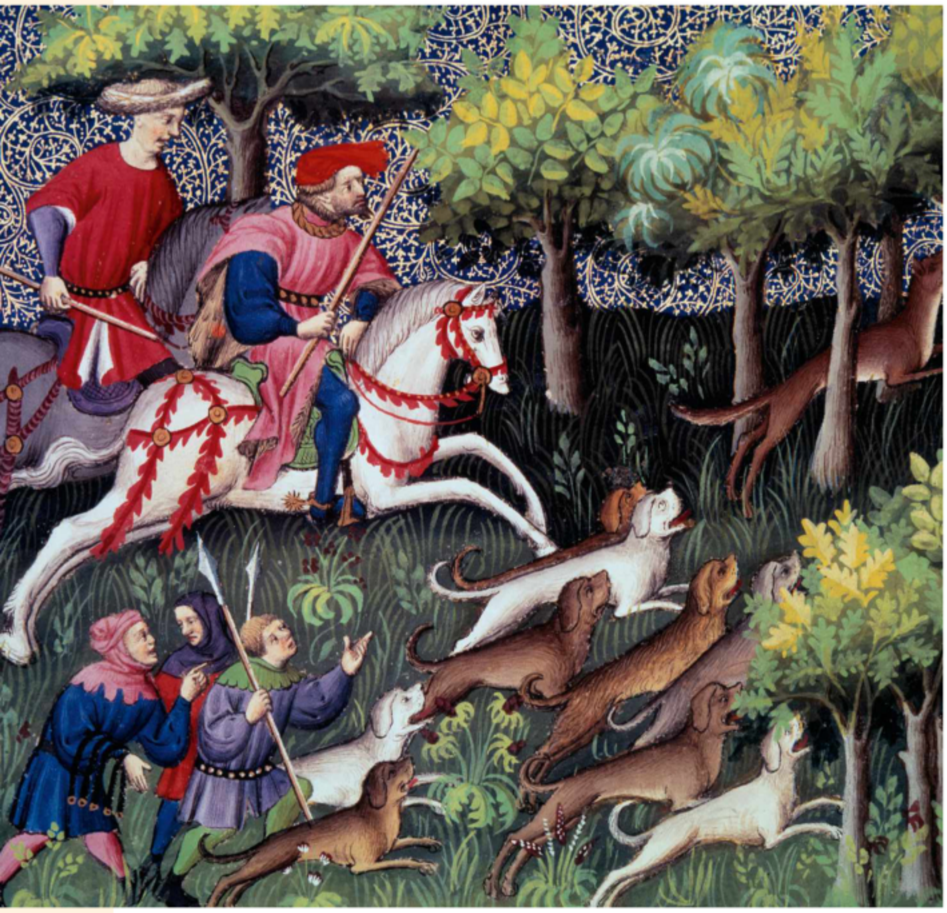
Medieval knights and noblemen could spend significant amounts of time on horseback. And who can blame them? This was, after all, the quickest way to get around. But it could also be extraordinarily painful.

Occupy the saddle for too long and you could start to suffer from an anal fistula – a condition that causes an abscess or an abnormal opening between the anal canal and the surrounding skin. This is as unpleasant as it sounds – which is why some sufferers called on the services of a medic called John Arderne.

Arderne was one of the most famous English surgeons of the 14th century. Among the novel developments he described in his writings, he came up with a procedure for treating anal fistulas that involved a surgical dilator called a *tendiculum* and a kind of flattened needle called an *acus rostrata*.

Arderne also illustrated the stages involved in the operation, and described medicines that could be injected into the rectum in a bid to promote healing. One of these – made up of rose oil and the single yolk of a raw egg – should be administered with the aid of a hollow wooden instrument called a *nastare ligneum*. This needed to be lubricated with rose oil and "gently inserted into the anus".

"This," Arderne promised, "effectively mitigates and mollifies any burning, stinging, itching and pain." His patients would, no doubt, have prayed that he was good to his word.



Nobles hunt a fox in a 14th-century miniature. Spending long periods in the saddle could lead to a painful condition for which surgeon John Arderne devised a novel treatment

…I'm about to go into labour

Childbirth was perhaps the most perilous event in any medieval woman's life. This was a primary focus of *Gynaecia*, a treatise perhaps written in the fifth or sixth century and ascribed to an author known as 'Muscio' (who was possibly from north Africa).

Gynaecia explained how normal and abnormal births should be managed, prioritised the role of midwives, and described different malpresentations

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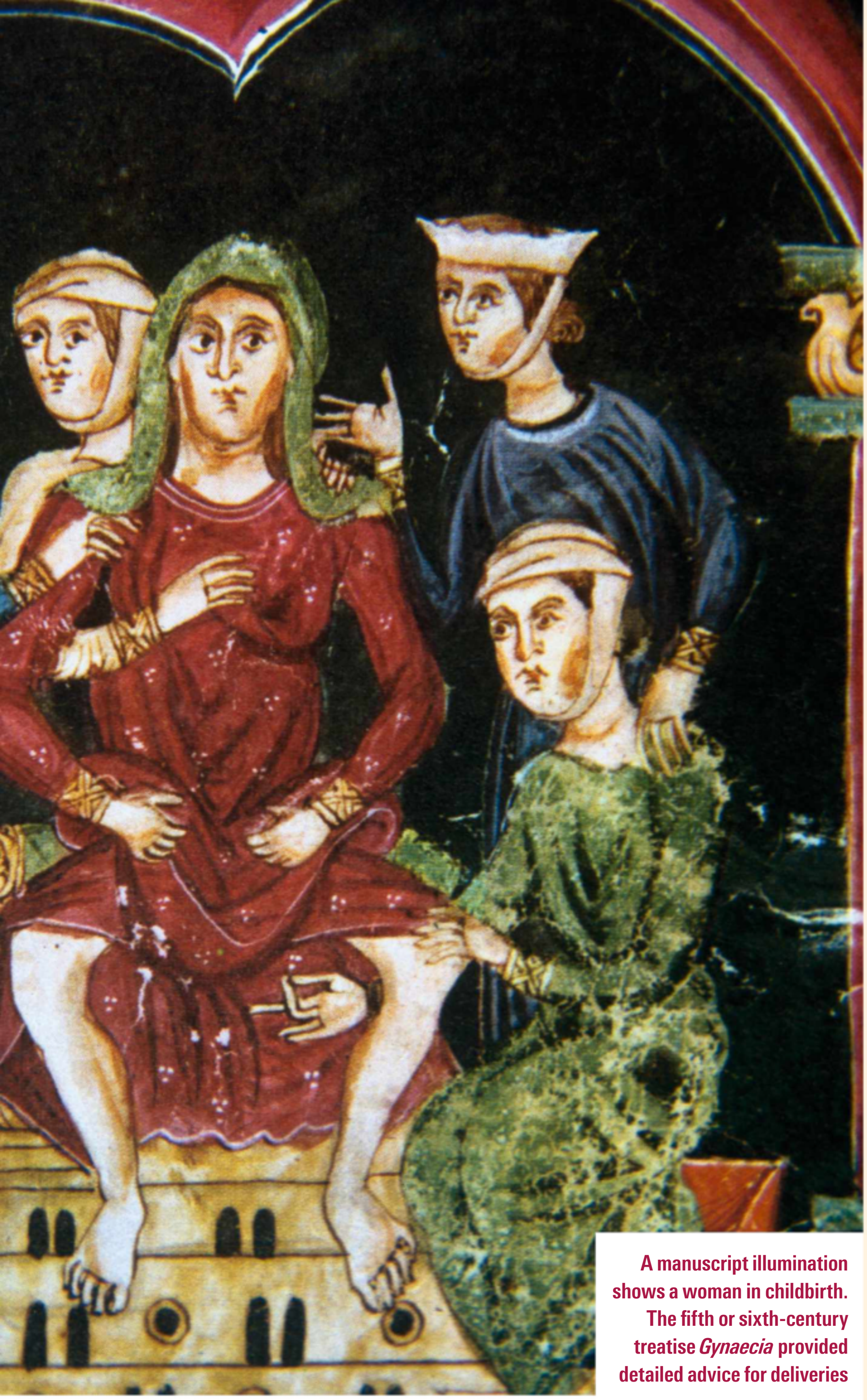

A manuscript illumination shows a woman in childbirth. The fifth or sixth-century treatise *Gynaecia* provided detailed advice for deliveries

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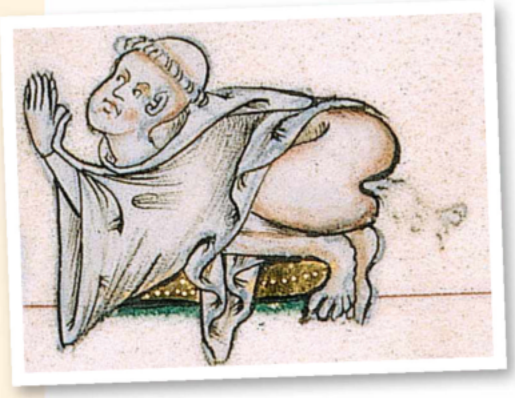
of the foetus – and what should be done to ease the birth in such cases. In one manuscript from the Middle Ages, passages from the *Gynaecia* are accompanied by illustrations showing these various positions of foetuses in wombs.

Some women who "travaileth of child" might turn to magic for help. Recipe books and medical guides both contained instructions for preparing protective amulets that should be lain on a woman's belly or thighs. Designed to be viewed, worn and read, these objects were believed to protect their wearers from harm by association with holy bodies and the pains they suffered.

One typical text from the late 14th or early 15th century invokes the names of holy mothers and their children: "Saint Mary bore Christ, Saint Anna bore Mary, Saint Elizabeth bore Saint John the Baptist." Another example contains images of the instruments of Christ's Passion and of his wounds and blood; a measurement of the length of the Virgin Mary's body; and prayers to early fourth-century mother-and-son martyrs Saint Julitta and Saint Quiricus.

…I can't stop farting



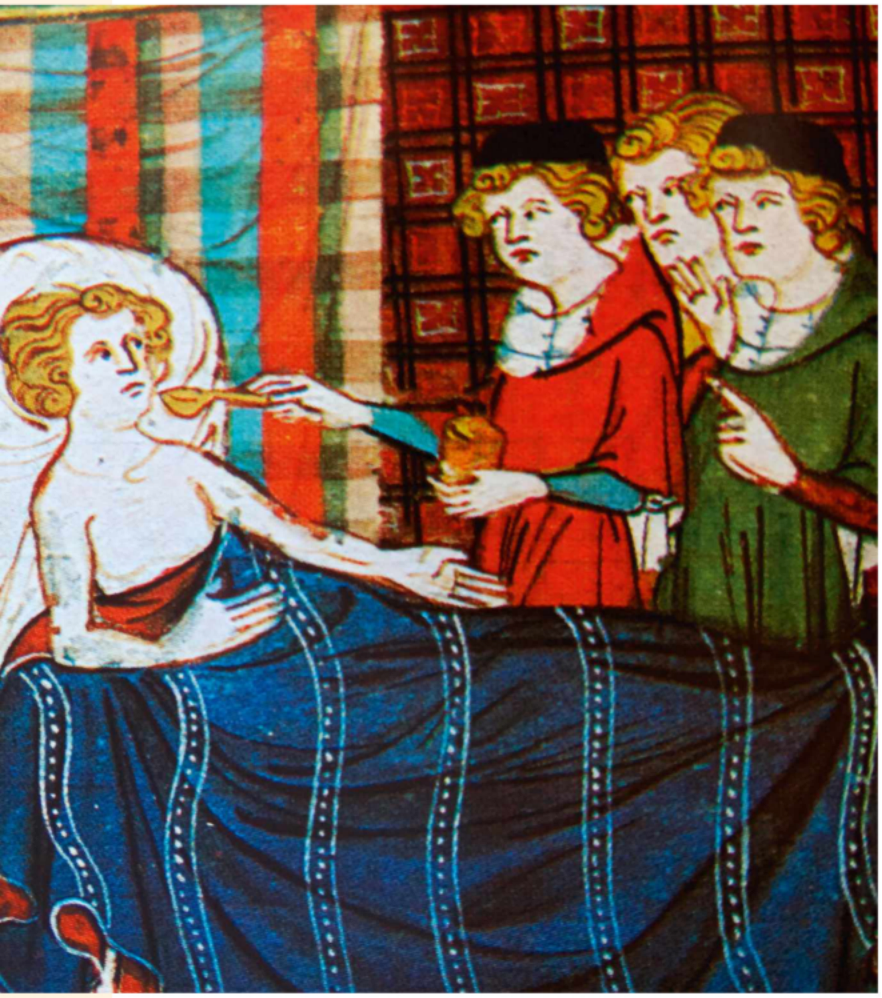
An unseemly cleric lets rip in a marginal manuscript illustration. Recipes for sweetened remedies aimed to treat wind

What did our medieval ancestors do when they were afflicted by stomach pains? And what remedies could they deploy if, worse still, that pain was accompanied by an attack of flatulence? One option was to take an electuary, a type of orally administered remedy sweetened, usually with honey, to make it more palatable.

A recipe for one such remedy contained a dizzying number of ingredients – some more familiar to the modern eye than others. These included sugar, chebulic myrobalan (fruits from an Asian tree), nuts, anise, caraway, fennel, cloves, the wood of aloes, mastic, French muscat and syrup. "You will," so the recipe instructed, "give this in the form of a hazelnut [ie as a hazelnut-sized pill], at morning and night with warm water and wine or with wine alone."

This recipe comes from a compilation of over a thousand remedies known as the *Antidotarium Magnum*, which was compiled in the 11th century by a monk of north African heritage known as Constantinus Africanus, who lived at the abbey of Monte Cassino in Italy. Innovatively, the text advised how much of each ingredient was required, using a system of symbols to denote measurements such as drams, scruples, pounds, sixths and halves.

The *Antidotarium Magnum*'s ingredients suggest that it was inspired by Islamic, Byzantine and classical sources. Yet that didn't stop a copy reaching Durham Cathedral Priory, where – judging by the presence of a key to explain the meaning of these symbols – the monks tried to make some of the medicines that it describes.



Doctors treat an ailing king, as depicted in an illumination in a 14th-century French manuscript. Charms were often used to treat conditions such as fevers

...I'm feeling feverish

In the modern world, fevers are understood to be symptoms of the body's immune response to infection. In the medieval period, however, a fever was thought to be a disease in its own right – an overheating of the body caused by malfunctioning digestive processes. And, in an attempt to turn down the heat, medieval medics often went on a charm offensive.

Today, science and magic tend to occupy separate spheres. In the Middle Ages, though, it was widely believed – even among learned medics – that words and rituals possessed healing potential, and many medieval manuscripts from the Middle Ages contain instructions for the recitation of magical charms.

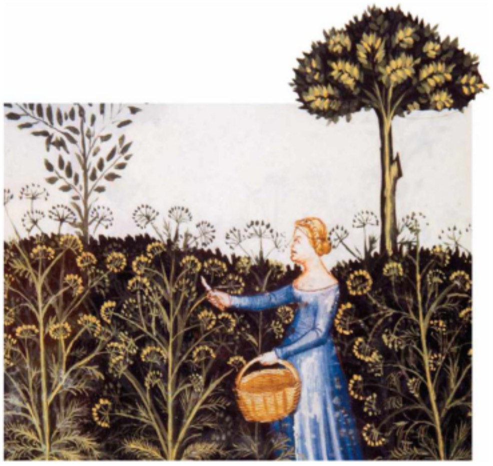
One example instructed the reader to make three signs of the cross "on the right ear of the feverish, and with each cross, say in succession: 'Christ conquers, Christ reigns, Christ commands.'" The reader was then advised to write a series of charms involving the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – not to mention a lamb, a sheep and a lion (all of which appear in a prophetic passage in Isaiah 11) – on the patient's palms.

But perhaps the most extraordinary feature of this charm was that its healing power was only realised when the patient drank the ink with which it was written. This may not have been particularly pleasing to the palate but the patient could at least console themselves in the promise that, "without doubt, he will be cured".

...I'm suffering from menstrual cramps

Not everyone could afford to pay for the services of elite medics such as John Arderne (see page 32). For the vast majority of people in the Middle Ages, finding a cure for illness meant relying on healers, their family or neighbours. These do-it-yourself doctors used everyday ingredients and common wild plants, which were crushed, chopped, boiled and strained with simple equipment found in the home. And, by the 14th and 15th centuries, this local medical knowledge bank was increasingly being collated and disseminated in hundreds of simple medicinal recipes written in vernacular languages.

The medicines contained within these recipes were often administered in draughts – liquid concoctions for patients to drink. Or they could be applied via sticky salves applied to the skin on pieces of fabric or leather. Some cures – such as one for "grinding and aching in the womb", found in a 15th-century English recipe – employed both. "Take five-leaf and stamp it and temper it with stale ale," it counselled, "and giveth the sick to drink thereof, five spoonfuls at once, and seethe and bind it to her navel as hot as she may suffer."



A medieval handbook shows a woman gathering medicinal plants. They were commonly used by 'do-it-yourself doctors' at this time

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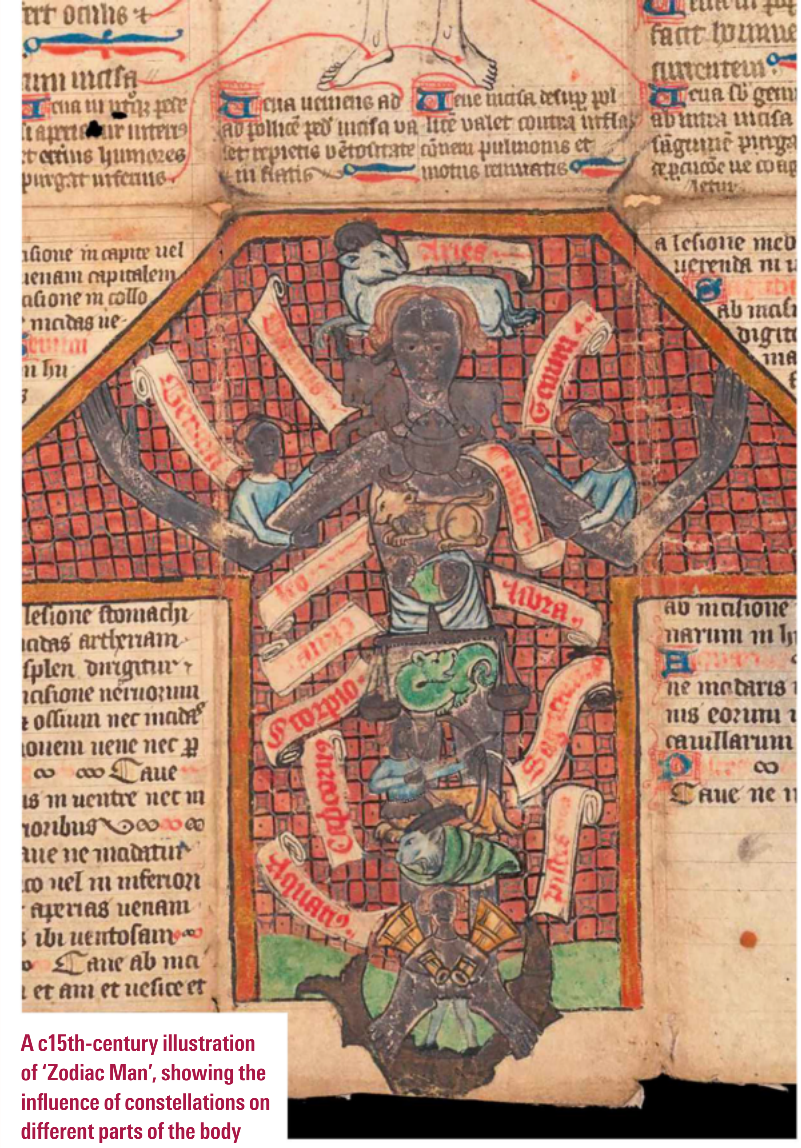


A c15th-century illustration of 'Zodiac Man', showing the influence of constellations on different parts of the body

...I've lost my hearing

If you opened a medical manuscript in the Middle Ages, then you may have been confronted by the sight of 'Vein Man'. No, 'Vein Man' wasn't a medieval superhero but a visual aid, designed to help readers locate veins in the human body. He makes for an interesting figure – chiefly for what he tells us about medieval people's attitudes to their health.

In order to cure many diseases, physicians might attempt to restore the correct humoural balance, often through purging the body of an excess or corrupted humour. A common method for this was phlebotomy, or bloodletting: the controlled release of blood from a patient's veins. That's where 'Vein Man' came into his own.

Accompanying labels described the ways in which bloodletting could alleviate a variety of ailments. For example: "Opening the vein next to the nostrils purges the head and aids and strengthens the hearing."

However, timing such interventions carefully was crucial. It was believed that each part of the body was governed by a sign of the Zodiac: Aries was linked to the head, whereas Pisces was connected to the feet. If the moon was in conjunction with a particular constellation, it was considered perilous to operate on the area governed by that sign of the Zodiac.

This principle was summarised in a second kind of diagram, 'Zodiac Man'. This comprised a human figure appended with the names (and sometimes miniature drawings) of the Zodiac signs. Again, accompanying labels provided advice – for example, when the moon was in Aries, you should "avoid incisions in the head or face and do not open the capital vein".

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY/TOPFOTO

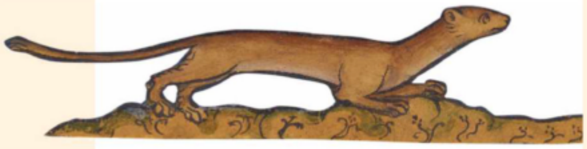
...I can't conceive

Have you ever procured a weasel testicle from your local pharmacy? Or burned half a handful of young mouse-ear in an earthenware pot? No, thought not. But if you'd lived 800 years ago – and been struggling to conceive – the answer may have been different.

Weasel testicle and mouse-ear (which, for those who don't know, is a plant found all over Britain and Ireland) were two of the main ingredients in a medieval treatment for infertility. One remedy instructed users to grind and combine them into a "soft pill" which should be placed "so deeply in the private parts that they touch the uterus". This was to be left for three days, during which the woman was advised to abstain entirely from sex. After this, the recipe continued, "she should have intercourse with a man and she should conceive without delay".

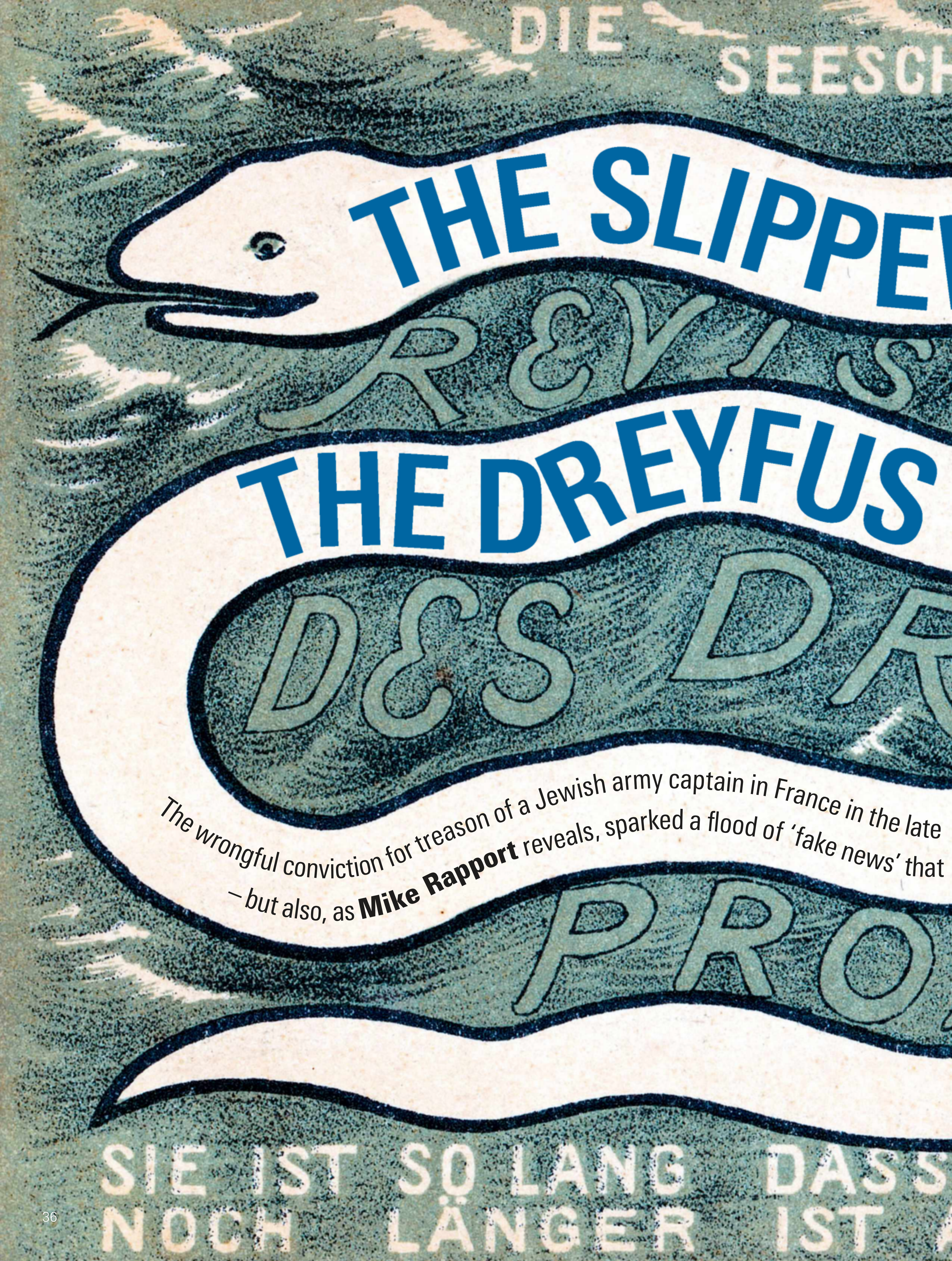
Medieval people believed that their world was divinely created and organised, with plants, animals and even stones placed there for the benefit of humans. It was thus logical that parts of an animal's body, or plants shaped like vital organs, might have curative properties for corresponding parts of a human body. Treatments for infertility often employed bits of animals known to be prolific breeders.

The remedy above was one of dozens compiled in the notebook of a Carmelite friar, Richard Tenet, in the early 15th century. Unlike monks, who were cloistered within their abbeys and priories, mendicant friars travelled between towns and cities; they relied on charitable alms, which they earned by preaching and hearing confessions. This brought them into contact with ordinary people, including women, from whom they appear to have learned common treatments.



An illustration of a weasel from a 13th-century bestiary. This mammal's testicles were ingredients in a medieval treatment for infertility

James Freeman is a medieval manuscripts specialist at the University of Cambridge. He is curator of Curious Cures: Medicine in the Medieval World, which is running at Cambridge University Library until 6 December: *lib.cam.ac.uk*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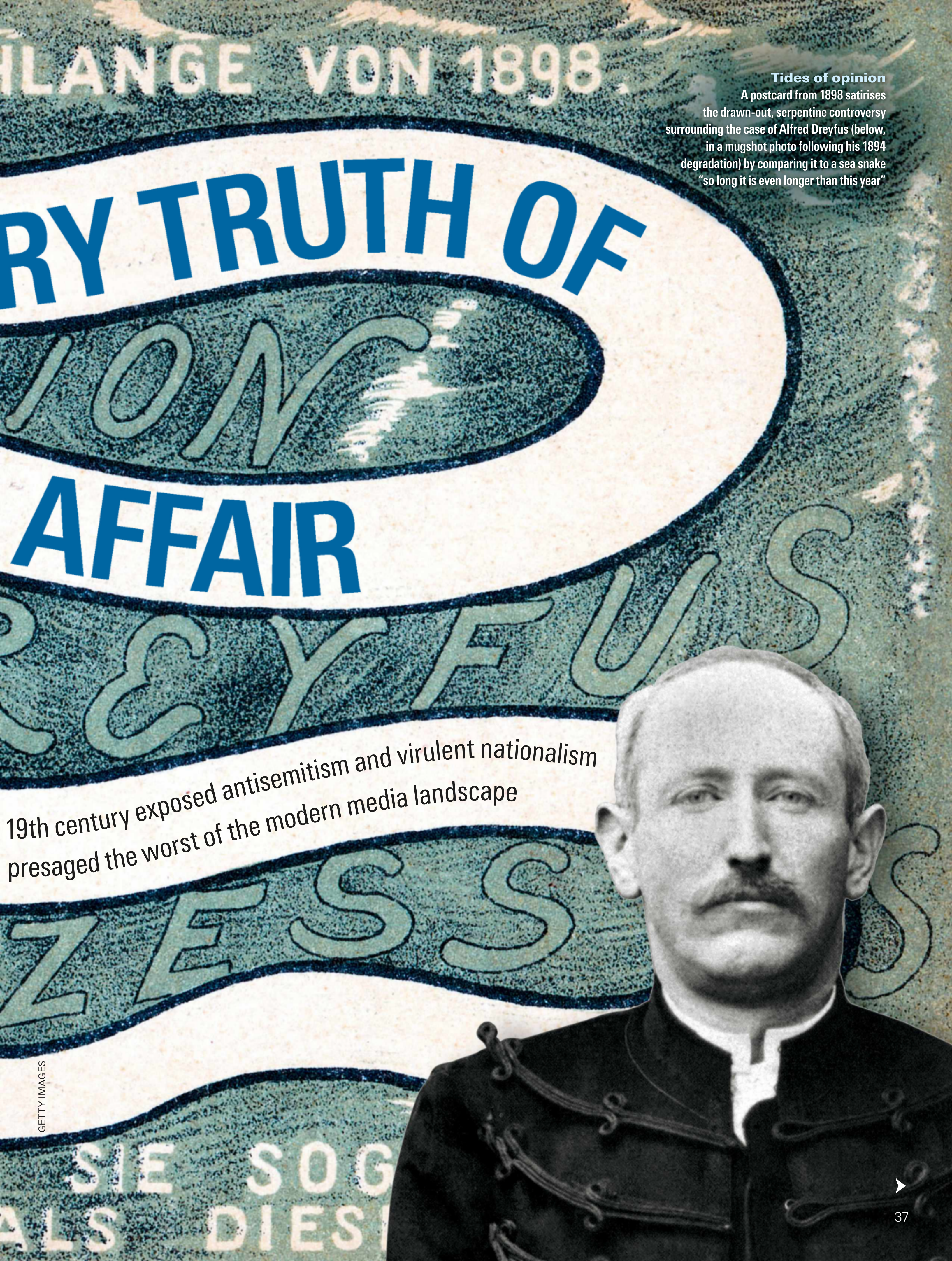
THE SLIPPE
THE DREYFUS

The wrongful conviction for treason of a Jewish army captain in France in the late
– but also, as **Mike Rapport** reveals, sparked a flood of 'fake news' that

RY TRUTH OF AFFAIR

19th century exposed antisemitism and virulent nationalism presaged the worst of the modern media landscape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Tides of opinion
A postcard from 1898 satirises the drawn-out, serpentine controversy surrounding the case of Alfred Dreyfus (below, in a mugshot photo following his 1894 degradation) by comparing it to a sea snake "so long it is even longer than this year"

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In the oppressive heat of his cell in the Mont-Valérien military prison west of Paris on 31 August 1898, Lieutenant-Colonel Hubert-Joseph Henry wrote a despairing letter to his wife, drank half a bottle of rum, and killed himself.

This desperate act was a pivotal moment in one of the best-known causes celebres in modern history: the Dreyfus Affair. The story of Henry's suicide, following his arrest for forging a document in the controversial case, was co-opted by the nationalist rightwing media as part of a tidal wave of coverage that threatened to destabilise French democracy and public trust in the Republic.

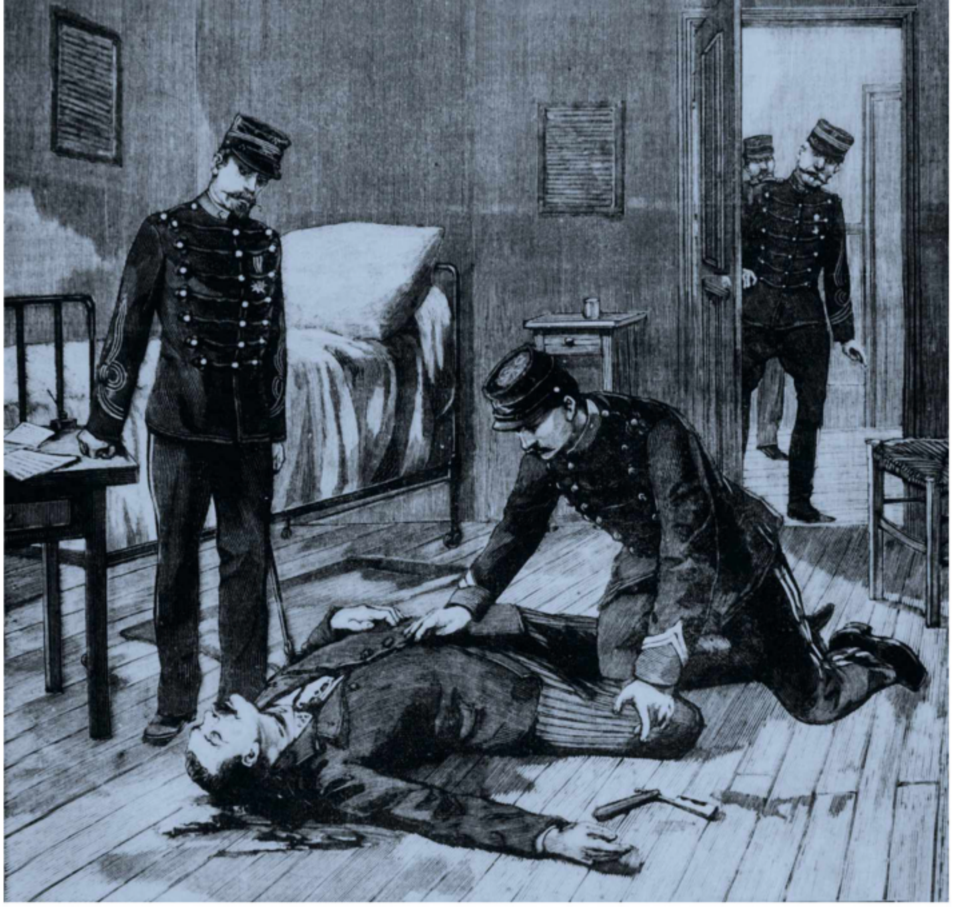
The background is well known today. In September 1894, Henry, a counter-espionage officer, had uncovered evidence of a mole within French military intelligence. A cleaner working in the German embassy (and in Henry's pay) had found a memorandum, since dubbed the '*bordereau*', written by an officer in the French General Staff revealing military secrets. The handwriting was identified as that of Alfred Dreyfus, an army captain then working in the War Ministry, who was arrested, court-martialled, publicly degraded and hauled off to solitary confinement on the notoriously harsh penal colony of Devil's Island, off French Guiana.

But the army had the wrong man.

Contradictions and irregularities in the case soon began to appear. In August 1896, the new head of military intelligence, Lieutenant-Colonel Georges Picquart, was examining more papers stolen from the German embassy. The handwriting on one was identical to that in the *bordereau* used to convict Dreyfus – but the signature was that of Ferdinand Walsin Esterhazy, a dissipated, debt-ridden, disreputable officer who had been selling secrets to the Germans for two years. Dreyfus, Picquart realised, was innocent.

Ignoring the errors

Even after this discovery, Dreyfus remained incarcerated for years longer because government officials, the army and large segments of public opinion refused to accept that a terrible error had been made. In part this was a result of the desire to maintain national security by authorities who were keen to avoid demoralising the army just as France secured a military alliance with the Russian empire, and amid heightened tensions with Germany following its annexation of the Alsace-Lorraine region from France in 1871. But it was also due to the fact that Dreyfus was from Alsace, and Jewish – at a time when a virulent strain of antisemitism based on 'scientific' racism had emerged, and as antisemites of different political persuasions associated Jews with either socialism or capitalism.



A martyr is made
An engraving depicts the discovery of the suicide of Lieutenant-Colonel Hubert-Joseph Henry following his arrest for forging a letter incriminating Dreyfus. Some thought his crime justifiable

Guilty man
Ferdinand Walsin Esterhazy, the officer who really wrote the treasonous memorandum attributed to Dreyfus. He was acquitted by a tribunal in 1898

Flames were stoked by a virulently partisan press that played a pivotal role in the battle for public opinion

These motives also played on a deeper division that had riven French society since 1789. There were those who, like Dreyfus himself, embraced the principles of the Revolution and its legacy as embodied in the Third Republic, founded in 1870. These included secularism, parliamentary democracy, civil equality and a world view exulting in science and human reason. Adherents of this strong current within French political culture generally became 'Dreyfusards' who supported the officer's innocence. Their opponents saw 1789 as a fatal breach with France's true historical destiny: Catholic, hierarchical and monarchical. More recently, this traditional conservatism had been joined by a new form of rightwing ideology promising social reform but which was also nationalist, authoritarian, antisemitic. Many of those with such views became 'anti-Dreyfusard', opposed to revisiting the case.

These flames were stoked by a virulently partisan newspaper press that played a

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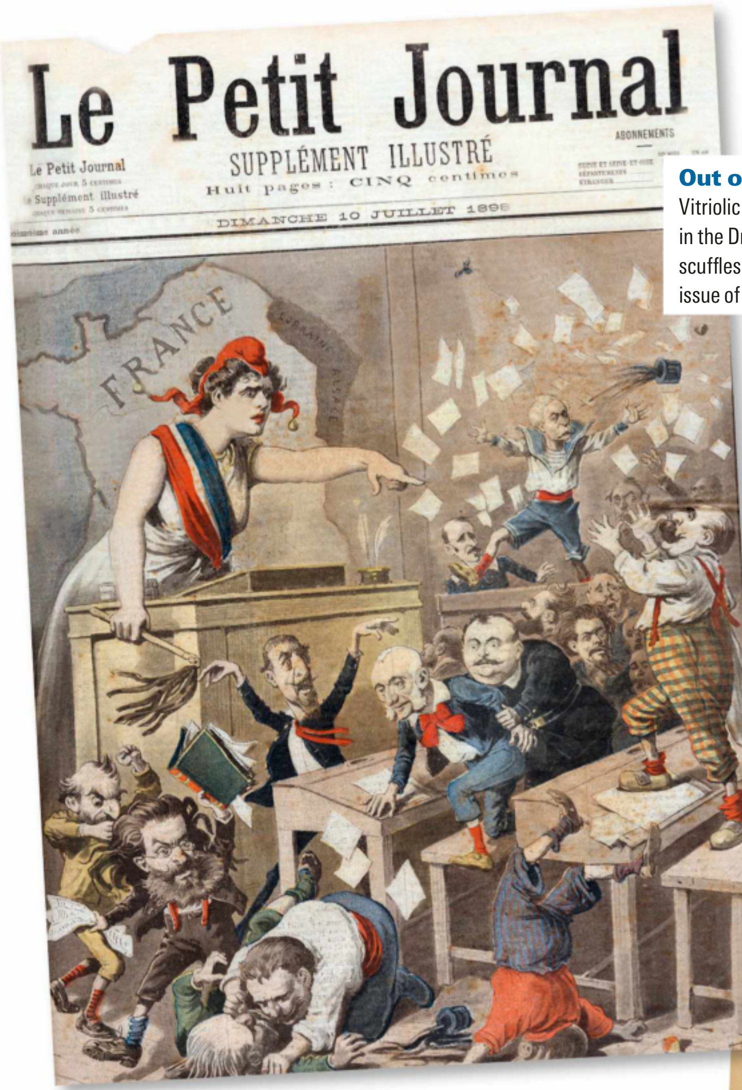
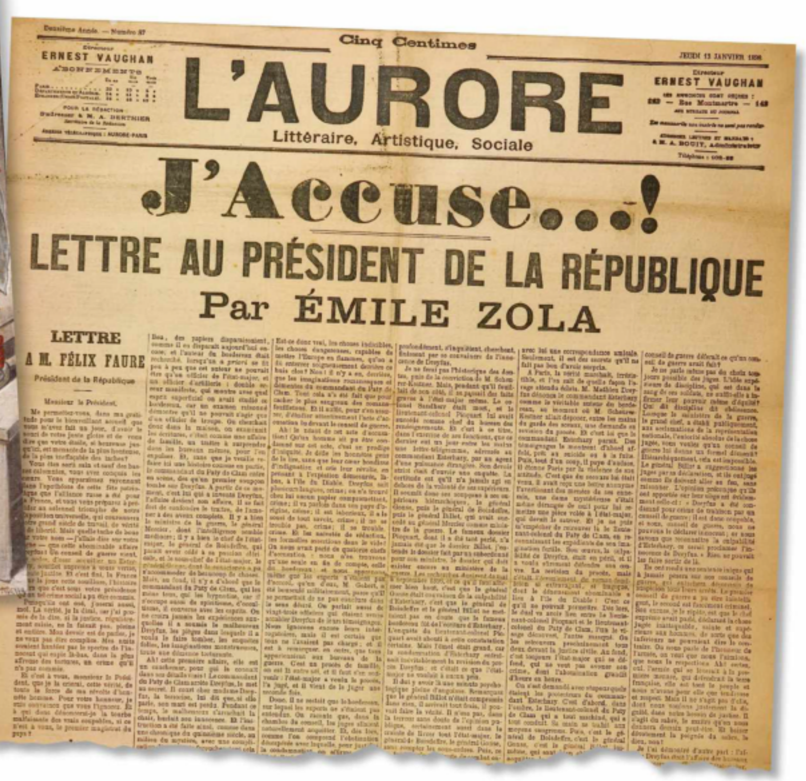
How the affair nearly tore France apart
Hear Maurice Samuels explain why these events threatened the Third Republic on our podcast: *historyextra.com/dreyfus-pod*



Out of control
Vitriolic tussles between the two factions in the Dreyfus Affair are satirised as scuffles in France's classroom in a July 1898 issue of *Le Petit Journal*

I Accuse…!
Émile Zola's open letter to the president of the Republic, accusing the army and government of a cover-up in the Dreyfus Affair, exposed deep rifts in French society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JEUDI 13 JANVIER 1898

Directeur
ERNEST VAUGHAN

L'AURORE
Littéraire, Artistique, Sociale

J'Accuse…!
LETTRE AU PRÉSIDENT DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE
Par ÉMILE ZOLA

LETTRE
A M. FÉLIX FAURE
Président de la République

Monsieur le Président,

pivotal role in the battle for public opinion. Print media had experienced a boom stimulated by more rapid communications, the introduction of photographs into newspapers, an expansion in advertising, and new forms of printing technology that made periodicals quicker and cheaper to produce and more widely available.

At that time, France had a particularly vibrant press. Free, compulsory and universal primary education for boys and girls from the early 1880s encouraged literacy, and a press law enacted in 1881 lifted almost all restrictions on what could be published, although this was rolled back in 1893 and 1894 after a spate of anarchist bombings. Journalists and publishers could be sued for slander, but cases were rarely successful. Between 1881 and the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, the number of periodical titles mushroomed by 250 per cent. These publications included broadsheets and tabloid newspapers representing the whole range of political opinions from the radical left to the extreme right.

Yet within this vibrant ecosystem of print lurked a danger that remains familiar in our age of social media, online news and artificial intelligence. It was all too easy to spread what we now call 'fake news' – misinformation (falsehoods spread unintentionally), disinformation (fabrications aimed at manipulating readers politically and socially) and malinformation (deception based on some truth, but twisted in such a way as to deceive).

Fake news

During the Dreyfus Affair, the newspaper press was infused with 'fake news'. Not for the last time, the episode exposed the friction between free speech on the one hand and, on the other hand, the challenges that arise when people of bad faith abuse that freedom, spreading falsehoods to manipulate public opinion, demonise certain groups of people, or undermine faith in the rule of law and democratic government.

The Dreyfus case sparked a truly explosive public controversy after Walsin Esterhazy was finally tried – and acquitted with unseemly haste – by a military court in January 1898. On 13 January, novelist Émile Zola published *J'Accuse…!*, an open letter to the president of the Republic, in *L'Aurore* newspaper. He accused the government and army of committing a gross injustice and of conspiring to cover up the truth. He specifically highlighted and decried the antisemitism, militarism and authoritarianism behind the falsehoods:

"It is a crime to lead public opinion astray," Zola wrote, "to manipulate it for a death-dealing purpose and pervert it to the point of delirium. It is a crime to poison the minds of the humble, ordinary people, to whip reactionary and intolerant passions into a frenzy while sheltering behind the odious bastion of antisemitism… It is a crime to play on patriotism to further the aims of hatred."

Following Zola's outburst, the Dreyfus

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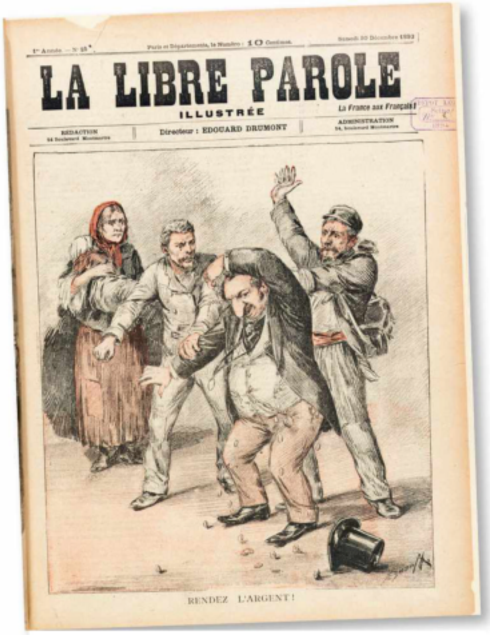
Affair erupted into a full-scale public storm. Except on rare occasions, newspapers tended to reinforce the beliefs of their readership rather than challenge them with facts. Giving readers what they wanted to hear was partly driven by economics: the conservative *Le Figaro*, for example, had stopped publishing Zola's articles towards the end of 1897 after he openly embraced the Dreyfusard cause, which hurt sales of the newspaper. Yet much of the fake news had an even more insidious purpose. Anti-Dreyfusard papers fuelled nationalist prejudices by targeting Jews; claimed to be defending the 'honour' of the army; and railed against the 'unpatriotic' manoeuvres of the Dreyfusards – all as a means of galvanising support for the assorted authoritarians, monarchists, nationalists and antisemites who loathed the Republic.

It was not that the Dreyfusards were innocent of spreading fake news. Although much of what Zola wrote in *J'Accuse…!* turned out to be accurate, he did not get everything right, as he himself appeared to admit when he finished by saying that he would willingly submit to prosecution for defamation under the 1881 Press Law. Zola did, in fact, face prosecution in 1898, avoiding imprisonment only by slipping away in June to England and living there in exile for a year.

Even some leftwing Dreyfusard newspapers tended to casually use the antisemitic trope of the Jew as capitalist to explain popular hostility against Jews. Anti-Dreyfusard publications saw Jews, socialists and leftwing republicans as a 'Syndicate of Treason' (as the vitriolic journalist Henri Rochefort put it). However, the Dreyfusard press was prone to sharing conspiracy theories of its own, seeing its opponents as part of an interwoven plot involving the Catholic church and the nationalists, aiming to destroy the Republic and the inheritance of 1789. Yet the anti-Dreyfusard press had most of the running: of the 55 dailies published at the time, only eight came out as Dreyfusard from February 1898, almost all of them with relatively low circulation numbers. The media was dominated by anti-Dreyfusard titles, which had an almost open field in which to bombard readers with a swirl of half-truths and outright lies, stoking prejudices and stirring up fears.



Antisemitic bile Poor French people try to retrieve money from a grotesquely caricatured Jewish 'capitalist' on the front page of the graphically antisemitic newspaper *La Libre Parole*

Forgiveable forgery

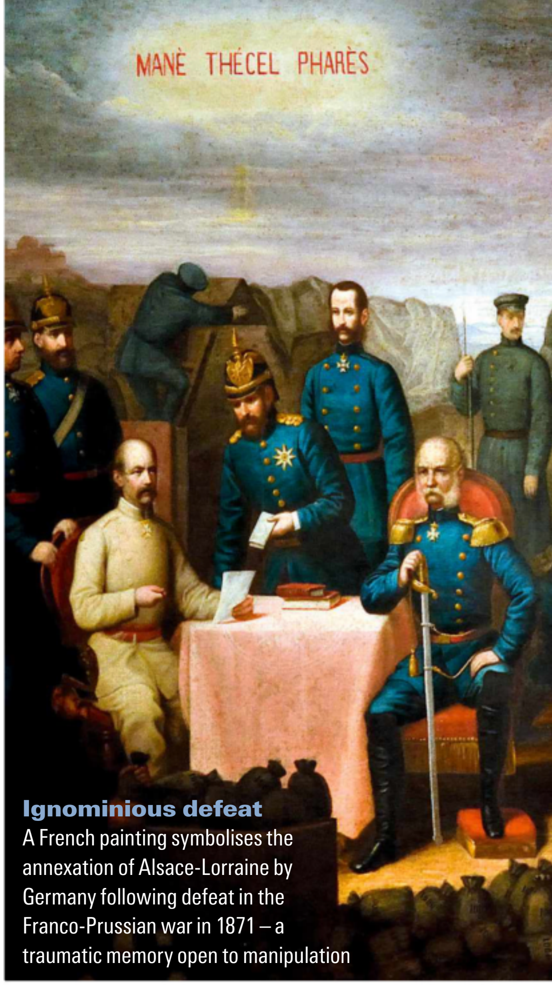
One of the most egregious moments came in the wake of Lieutenant-Colonel Henry's death. After his colleague, Picquart, had exposed Esterhazy as the real traitor in 1896, Henry had tried to bolster the case against Dreyfus by forging a letter that 'proved' his guilt, introducing it into the dossier of evidence. The ruse was successful until, as the pressure mounted over the course of 1898, the government investigated and discovered that forgery, leading to Henry's arrest and suicide.

For anti-Dreyfusard journalists, Henry's crime was forgiveable: it was 'patriotic' because it served a higher cause – the security of the nation. Dreyfus was guilty anyway, they claimed; and even if he were innocent, those who sought to clear his name were traitors working for Germany.

The virulently nationalist *La Patrie* accused Zola of doing untold harm to the army: "And since that day, the damage has surged in like a torrent, roared like a tempest. Who has not recognised in this tactic the workings of Bismarckian [ie German] politics?"

The idea that Henry was a martyr to the cause of patriotism gained traction when the explicitly and graphically antisemitic *La Libre Parole* opened a subscription for the Lieutenant-Colonel's widow, Berthe, which received no fewer than 25,000 donations. The newspaper published the many antisemitic and anti-republican messages sent along with the money. *La Libre Parole* means 'Free Speech', making it a case study for how prejudice and anti-democratic forces cloak themselves in the very freedoms that they seek to destroy or to deny to others.

The Dreyfus case was – rightly or wrongly – seen as connected with both national security and the country's future, so both sides entrenched themselves deeply within their positions. The more that the problems with Dreyfus's conviction trickled out, the more the anti-Dreyfusards reinvigorated strategies that rested less on facts than on what is today called 'gaslighting' and on deflection, both of which involved stoking prejudices and demeaning opponents.



Ignominious defeat
A French painting symbolises the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine by Germany following defeat in the Franco-Prussian war in 1871 – a traumatic memory open to manipulation

Gaslighting, by which the perpetrator seeks to cast doubt on the truth, was deployed by Édouard Drumont, editor of *La Libre Parole,* who in June 1898 assured his readers that Dreyfusards were merely "a clutch of cosmopolitans who always talk of pieces of paper and documents but never prove anything" – the term 'cosmopolitan' being a dog-whistle term denoting unpatriotic or Jewish people.

Nationalist writer Maurice Barrès made a more sophisticated use of gaslighting. Nothing in the Dreyfus Affair was demonstrably true, he argued in *Le Journal* in February 1898, so "how do you intend… to undertake to solve the problem when you do not have all the data?" he demanded of the Dreyfusards.

Barrès' purpose was to cast doubt on the significance of the few facts that were, at that point, already public knowledge. He took this further by suggesting that there are some truths that are "foreign to individual reason", and that national circumstances and interests were the true barometer of what was just and true. "It is necessary to judge things in the relative," Barrès argued, opening the way for his readership to be secure in their prejudices – because for them the army's honour and national security were more important than the facts of any miscarriage of justice.

Anti-Dreyfusard newspapers tried in various ways to deflect their readers' atten-

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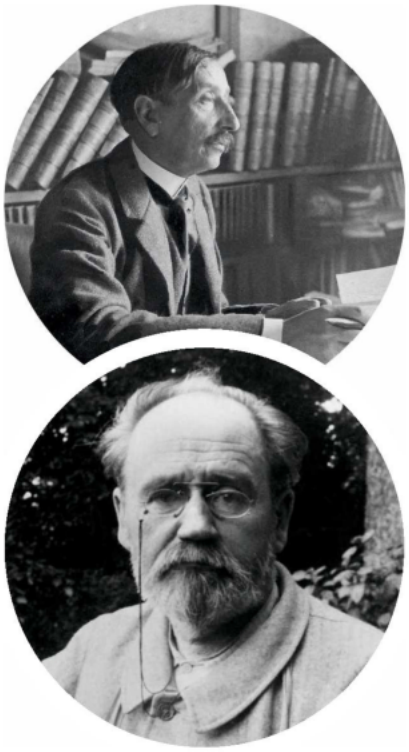


Opposing views Nationalist writer Maurice Barrès (top) entreated readers to consider national security above the facts of the miscarriage of justice, in contrast with the moral arguments of Dreyfusard Émile Zola

tion away from the question of the convicted man's innocence and onto other targets. This was a strategy behind the argument that Henry's forgery was 'patriotic': his crime was minor compared to the real danger, which would be the victory of the Dreyfusards, who were no better than traitors. *La Patrie* proclaimed in September 1898: "Let us leave those cosmopolitans from Frankfurt to howl with joy over the tomb of that modest child of French soil [Henry]… Let us turn away with disgust from the spectacle of the odious triumph of the worst enemies of the army and of the country." In that one sentence, the newspaper connected the Dreyfusards with treason, with Germany and Jews ('cosmopolitans'), and with the ignominy of defeat – 'Frankfurt' being a reference to the humiliating peace treaty with Germany at the end of the Franco-Prussian War in 1871.

Demeaning caricatures

At the same time, the anti-Dreyfusard press demeaned their opponents, caricaturing them as effeminate wimps, sexually sterile and highly strung, and contrasted them with the muscular, virile masculinity of the army officers whom they were accused of attacking.

Zola was frequently depicted with simian characteristics: hairy, fat, thick-lipped. Dreyfus and other Jewish figures were ascribed the whole range of antisemitic tropes. *La Libre Parole* compared the 'French' femininity of Henry's widow, Berthe, with the Jewish Dreyfusard Joseph Reinach, who was "puffy, swarthy, sweaty, stomach bulging". For some, it did not even matter that Dreyfus was innocent: he was Jewish, so for the nationalists the greater 'truth' was that he could never be French. The process of gaslighting and deflection combined to stoke prejudices and popular fears, fogging out the original question of Dreyfus's innocence.

Yet a denouement was eventually reached. In February 1899, President Félix Faure – who opposed reopening Dreyfus's case – died of a brain haemorrhage. He was succeeded by a Dreyfusard, Émile Loubet, whose election by parliament prompted an unsuccessful coup attempt by the Ligue des Patriotes and the Ligue antisémitique, who provided the street muscle of the anti-Dreyfusard movement. In June, the appeals court quashed Dreyfus's conviction and ordered a retrial, which took place in August and September 1899 in Rennes – Paris being deemed too dangerous. Shockingly, the military tribunal again found the captain guilty. President Loubet issued a formal pardon, but Dreyfus was not officially cleared until 1906. He returned to the army, serving with merit in the First World War.

The Dreyfus Affair showed how, when the stakes were high and when divisions ran deep, a torrent of half-truths, lies, deflection, the stoking of fear and prejudices, and appeals to 'patriotism' made it difficult for citizens to make informed decisions. It also demonstrated that many citizens were content to have their prejudices reaffirmed rather than critically examined.

This is why Barrès' argument that the nation had needs that were above reason and truth was so corrosive to democratic politics. The principle that truth, justice and legality could be judged only according to national interests allowed readers to indulge in a kind of relativism that justified falsehoods and injustice in pursuit of a conception of France that excluded groups who were the bogeymen of the nationalist right: Jews, foreigners, Protestants, Freemasons, socialists and others. It also exposed the spiky question that every democracy faces when freedom of expression becomes a means of undermining confidence and trust in its institutions: how to defend itself without infringing the very liberties that are its essence.

Ultimately, the lesson of the Dreyfus Affair is that, in an age of mass media, citizens not only need to be equipped to make the honest effort to assess critically their sources of information and to examine their positions with verifiable evidence: they have to be *willing* to do so. In December 1898, *L'Aurore* understood that this was essential to the survival of democracy: "It is for citizens to inform themselves, to think, to use their will; it is for them to reform their morals, to no longer let themselves be taken for fools or as things to be juggled with and to emancipate themselves, not by force, but by ideas." We need, the newspaper concluded, to "enlighten [our] brains, not slice them open!" H

Anti-democratic forces cloak themselves in the very freedoms that they seek to destroy

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES/TOPFOTO

Mike Rapport is reader in modern European history at the University of Glasgow

Hear Melvyn Bragg and guests discuss the Dreyfus Affair in an episode of BBC Radio 4's **In Our Time** at *bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b00n1l95*

Q&A

A selection of historical **conundrums** answered by experts

Were the ancient Greeks really addicted to fish?

One answer to this question is relatively straightforward. For much of Greek history, people living near the coast or on the islands ate plenty of fish and seafood – not out of obsession, but out of practicality. The sea offered a reliable, accessible source of nutrition.

It is essential, though, to remember that the ancient Greeks did not comprise a single, unified culture. Tastes varied widely across cities and centuries. Moreover, like modern consumers, different individuals had different preferences: some sought out rare and expensive fish, while others avoided seafood altogether. In Homer's epics, for instance, there is a striking aversion to seafood: he refers to the consumption of fish only twice, in both instances as a desperate measure in the face of starvation. In fact, Odysseus's men would rather risk divine punishment for eating the sacred cattle of the sun than resort to fish. For Homeric heroes, seafood seemed beneath their heroic dignity.

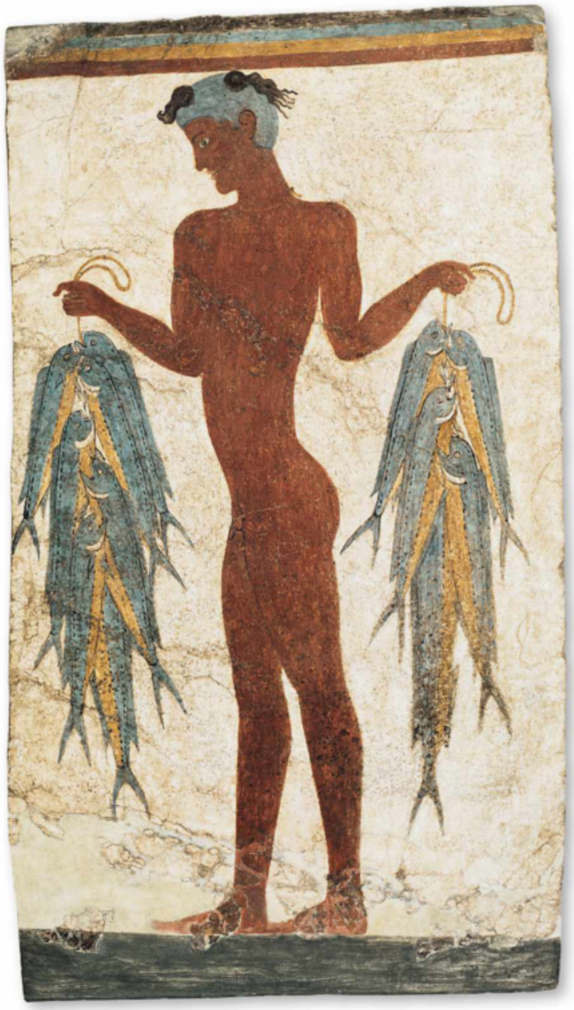
In classical Athens, the picture was dramatically different. Here, fish appears to have taken on a cultural significance that bordered on obsession. There were clear socio-economic factors behind this fixation with fish: the finest varieties commanded high prices, and certain seafoods became luxury items for the Athenian elite.

Much of our evidence, however, is coloured by its comic origins: it comes from fragments of Athenian comedy preserved in Athenaeus's *Deipnosophistae*, a sprawling banquet dialogue from the second or third century AD. Comedy doesn't merely reflect social trends – it magnifies, distorts and satirises them.

A refined palate or a taste for expensive fish became an exaggerated addiction in Athenian comedy. Gluttonous characters abandon morality and self-restraint in their lust for seafood. They sing extended, virtuosic songs about fish. They describe their cravings in overtly sexual terms, and they lace their language with seafood-laden jokes about prostitutes, sex and genitalia.

So were the ancient Greeks truly addicted to fish? Perhaps in Athens – but even there, most of the evidence for this idea comes from the comic stage, where appetites were absurdly inflated. What we're witnessing in these pieces of art may be less a historical truth than a long-running joke. And, of course, tastes varied across the Greek world. What held true in one city or century might have meant little in another.

Carl Shaw, professor of classics, New College of Florida



A fresco from the Greek island of Santorini, dating from around the 16th century BC, shows a boy holding fish

Henry Paget, the 'Dancing Marquess' of Anglesey, pictured c1900. He scandalised society but is now an LGBTQ icon

Who was the 'Dancing Marquess?'

To call Henry Cyril Paget, 5th Marquess of Anglesey, an eccentric would be an understatement. A flamboyant, scandalous hedonist with a lust for spending and showmanship, he inherited his title in 1898, aged just 23, along with estates in Anglesey, Staffordshire, Derbyshire and Dorset, and a fortune that made him the equivalent of a multi-millionaire today. This he blew at an astonishing rate, buying clothes and jewellery in bulk, hosting lavish parties, even ordering luxury cars to be converted so that they emitted fumes that smelled like rose-scented perfume.

He also indulged his love of theatre. Having renamed his estate of Plas Newydd to Anglesey Castle, he replaced the chapel with a 150-seat theatre that he called the Gaiety, and hired professional troupes to put on shows for guests and locals, free of charge. He even took his productions on tour. With himself in the lead – naturally – every performance included his 'butterfly dance', for which he wore jewel-encrusted dresses and waved silk robes as wings. The newspapers dubbed him "the Dancing Marquess", and delighted in condemning his opulence and speculating about his sexuality.

By 1904, however, the well had run dry. To pay his debts, Paget's vast caches of belongings were sold off in auctions lasting 40 days – the so-called Great Anglesey Sales. He died the following year, aged 29, from complications of tuberculosis. Despite his family's attempts to expunge all memory of this embarrassment to Edwardian society, in recent years he has been rehabilitated and celebrated as a free-spirited LGBTQ icon.

Jonny Wilkes, freelance writer

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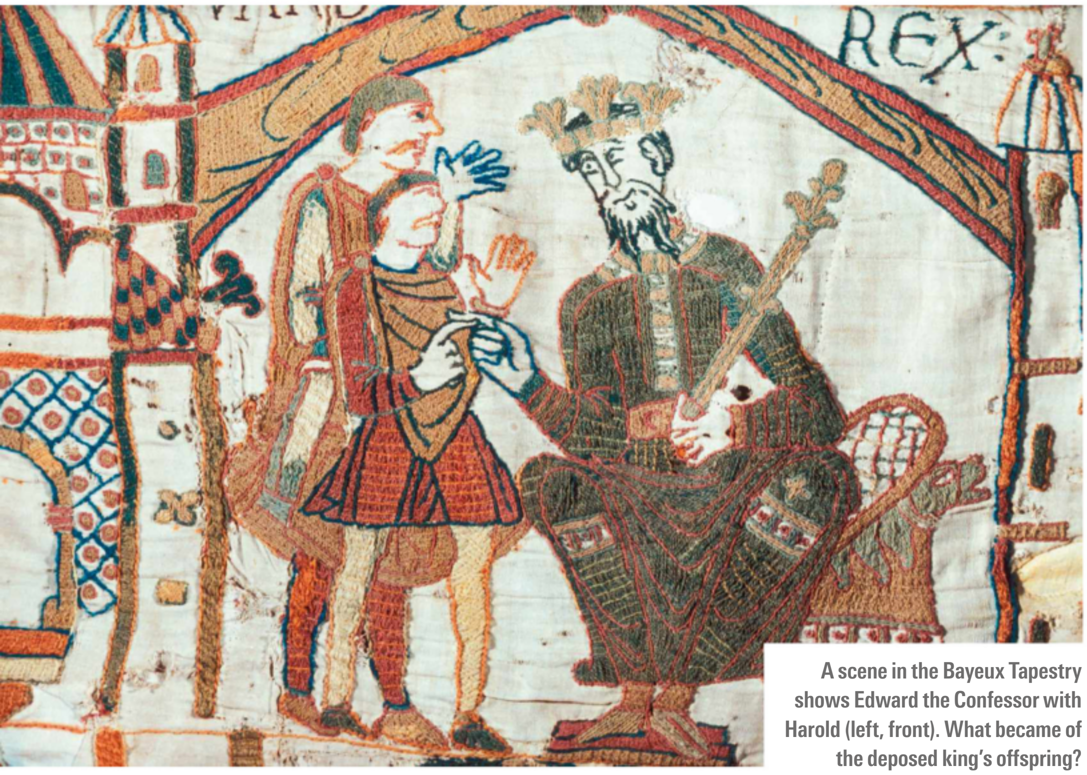


A scene in the Bayeux Tapestry shows Edward the Confessor with Harold (left, front). What became of the deposed king's offspring?

What happened to Harold Godwinson's children after Hastings?

The battle of Hastings changed the course of English history. William, Duke of Normandy emerged as king of England. His vanquished foe, King Harold II, lay dead on the battlefield. William could now marshal his forces to complete the conquest of England. Yet the family of the fallen Anglo-Saxon monarch still posed a threat.

Harold's mother, Gytha, became a figurehead of rebellion in Exeter in those early years, and there were concerns that his seven children might one day seek to claim the throne. Harold had three sons, Godwin, Edmund and Magnus, and two daughters, Gunhild and Gytha, with his first wife, Edith Swanneck. He also had two more sons, Harold and Ulf, possibly with his second wife, Ealdgyth (or Edith), though confusion remains over Ulf's parentage.

In 1066 Harold's eldest sons, Godwin and Edmund, were teenagers, and fled to Ireland, where they lived under the protection of the king of Leinster. Twice, in 1068 and 1069, they led a fleet of ships to western England aiming to overthrow the Norman regime, but had no success. Having received no support, they may have fled again, to the court of Sweyn II of Denmark, to whom they were related. It is possible that their brother Magnus accompanied them to Ireland; he might have died on their doomed campaigns, or perhaps became a monk in Sussex or a count in what's now Poland.

Accounts suggest that Harold junior entered the service of Olaf III of Norway, taking part in expeditions to Orkney, the Hebrides, the Isle of Man and Anglesey. Ulf, however, was captured immediately after Hastings and remained imprisoned until William's death in 1087. By then, any thoughts he might have had of opposing the new regime had been stamped out, and he became a knight of the new Duke of Normandy.

As for Harold's daughters, Gunhild stayed in England after 1066 and was set to marry one of William's inner circle, Alan the Red. When he died shortly afterwards, she ended up with his brother, Alan the Black. Gytha, meanwhile, escaped to Denmark and married Vladimir, who later became the grand prince of Kiev, and had several children. One of them was referred to in Norse sagas as Harald – a nod to Gytha's father, long after the English crown was prised from his grasp. ***JW***

TOPFOTO/ALAMY

DID YOU KNOW…?

Dash of colour

The first Olympic medal won by Ireland was awarded for painting. Between 1912 and 1948, art competitions were part of the modern Olympic Games. In Paris in 1924, less than two years after the creation of the Irish Free State, a silver medal was awarded for *Natation* (or *The Liffey Swim*), a piece by Jack Butler Yeats, brother of poet WB Yeats. The new nation had to wait another four years before hammer-thrower Pat O'Callaghan became its first athlete to win a medal.

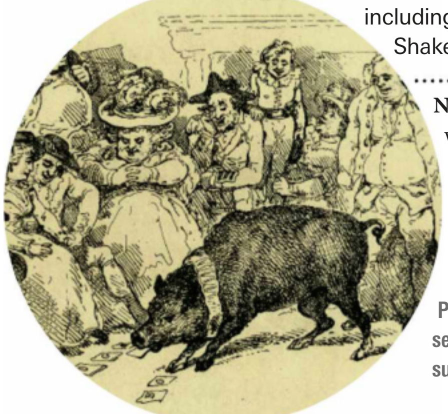
Explosive suggestion

Adolf Hitler was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in January 1939. Swedish politician Erik Brandt put forward Hitler's name in a letter sent to the Norwegian Nobel Committee, extolling the Nazi leader's "glowing love for peace" . Brandt's suggestion – intended to make an ironic statement about Hitler's warmongering – was met with outrage from many people who took it seriously, and he withdrew it a few days later. Within months, Hitler's Germany had invaded Poland.

Swine fever

A 'learned pig' became a sensation in London in 1785. The sage swine appeared to answer a series of mathematical problems and other questions by indicating cards with its snout. "This entertaining and sagacious animal," as it was described, became the talk of the town. It featured in a caricature by Thomas Rowlandson and, according to a 1786 book entitled *The Story of the Learned Pig*, was the reincarnation of famous historical figures including the real author of Shakespeare's plays.

Nick Rennison, writer and journalist specialising in history



Thomas Rowlandson's drawing of 'The Wonderful Pig', which became a sensation in London for its supposed intelligence

What happened to Napoleon's son?

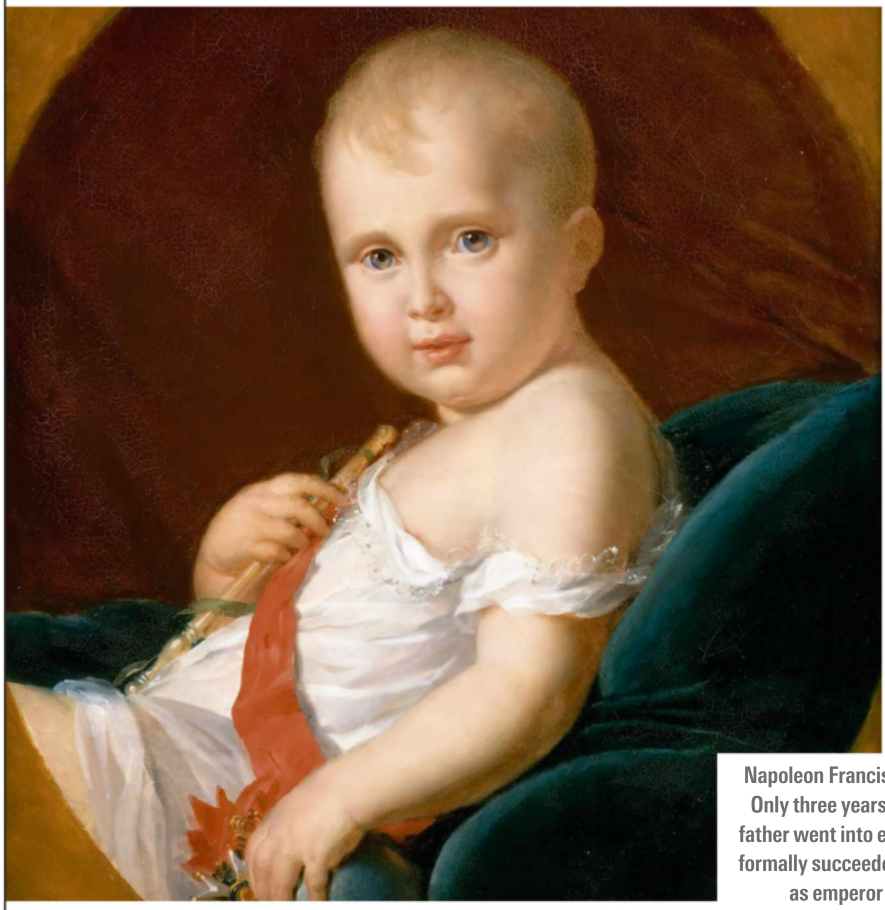
Napoleon Francis Joseph Charles Bonaparte was born in the Tuileries Palace, Paris, on 20 March 1811, the much longed-for son and heir of Napoleon I and Marie-Louise, daughter of Francis I, emperor of Austria. Having defeated Francis in the war of 1809, Napoleon had forced him to let him marry his daughter the following year. The French emperor hoped that his new bride could bear him a son – something that his former wife of many years, Joséphine, had not. Marie-Louise soon obliged.

Almost immediately, Napoleon took the infant to a balcony and presented him to the men of his Imperial Guard, who cheered loudly and nicknamed the infant '*L'Aiglon*' (the Eaglet, after the insignia of the Napoleonic armies). The baby, soon given the title of king of Rome, was the heir to two great European empires and the idol of Napoleon's loyalists. He was also the emperor's greatest hope for the survival of his dynasty. But in 1814, after a series of crushing military defeats, Napoleon was forced to abdicate and retire to Elba, and his plans for the boy were dashed.

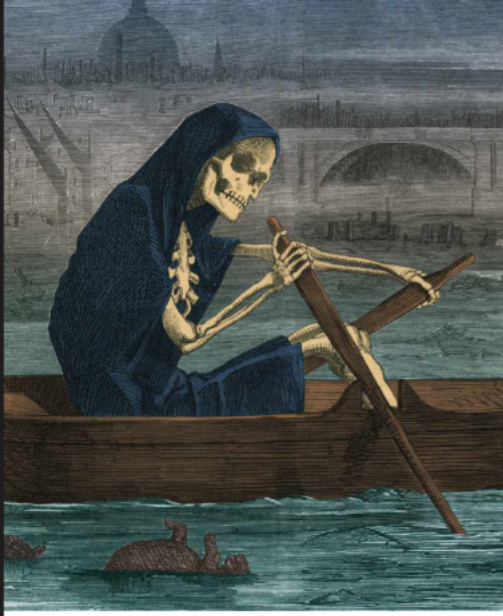
Marie-Louise tried valiantly to have her son succeed Napoleon with herself as regent, but the powers that had defeated France were adamant that the dynasty was finished. This stance hardened further after Napoleon escaped from Elba and tried to regain power – an attempt that ended with his defeat at Waterloo and final exile to St Helena. Napoleon Francis was not even allowed to join his mother in her new role as Duchess of Parma. Instead, he was given the Austrian title Duke of Reichstadt, and kept under close watch – in a 'gilded cage' – in Vienna.

Marie-Louise's son continued to live in obscurity, though he became an icon of resistance, regarded as 'Napoleon II' by veterans and supporters of his father. His name was also chanted on the barricades during the 1830 revolution in France. He died in 1832, after pointlessly reviewing troops in the pouring rain, but continued to be revered among Bonapartists.

Michael Broers, professor of western European history, University of Oxford



Napoleon Francis as an infant. Only three years old when his father went into exile, he never formally succeeded Napoleon I as emperor of the French



The Thames is depicted as the Styx in a *Punch* cartoon of 1858, when the 'Great Stink' forced a sewer upgrade for London

What was the Great Stink of 1858?

For centuries, the river Thames had been used as a dumping ground for London's waste, from industrial runoff to the sewage from every home. By the turn of the 19th century, the state of the water was dire – and matters only worsened as the population more than doubled to 2.5 million by 1850. What's more, the city's drinking water was drawn from the Thames, and diseases such as typhoid and cholera wreaked havoc.

Nothing was done to address the problem until 1858, when an unusually hot summer caused water levels in the river to drop, baking the filth in the sun and creating an unbearable stench. Importantly, this acrid odour assailed politicians in the new Palace of Westminster, which had been built on the riverbank. When dousing the curtains with chloride of lime did not keep out the stench, the MPs finally took action – and quickly. In just 18 days, they passed a bill authorising a loan of £3m to fund a major infrastructure project that aimed to address the 'Great Stink'.

The Metropolitan Board of Works, led by chief engineer Joseph Bazalgette, was tasked with building a new system of interconnected sewers and pumping stations. Completed in 1875, the project changed the very look of the city – most notably, building embankments to conceal the sewers – and, more importantly, improved water quality and cut the smell. It was a marvel of engineering that changed the shape of London to this day. ***JW***

TOPFOTO/ALAMY

Is it true that Tudor dinner guests were expected to bring their own cutlery?

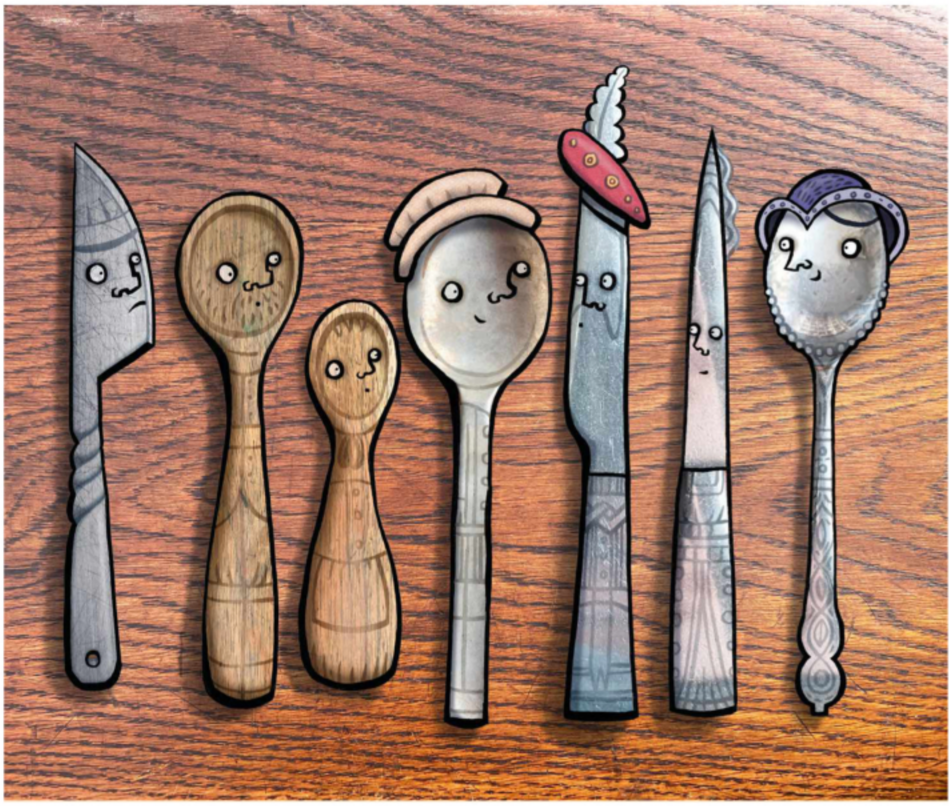


ILLUSTRATION BY **GLEN McBETH**

››› Tudor English society was highly stratified according to status, wealth and power. Cutlery served as a culinary social marker, signalling ambitions to the wider community.

A person carried their own knife and spoon, and the material from which each was made – along with the degree of embellishments – indicated the rank and prosperity of its owner. Early 16th-century knives were made of wrought iron, with a steel cutting edge; by the end of the century, the entire blade was steel. The haft (hilt) was made from decorative latten (an alloy of copper and zinc), wood, horn or bone, attached to the side of the tang by rivets. Silver spoons – often gilded – were reserved for those at the top of the social tree, while pewter served the middling class. The simplest spoons were carved from wood, bone or horn.

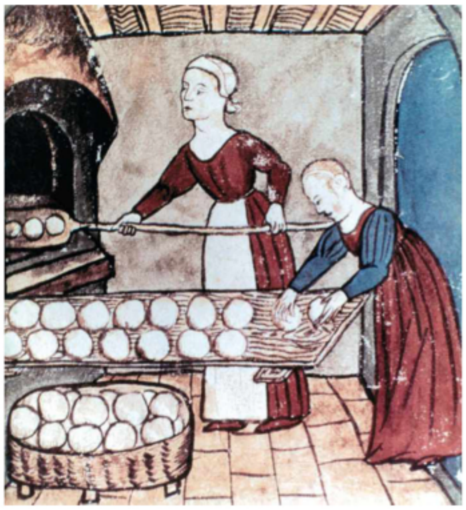
Eating knives were carried in leather sheaths or scabbards, hanging at the belts of men and often suspended by cords attached to women’s gowns. A spoon was carried in the same way, in a leather pouch known as a *gypcière*, or tucked into a hat. Only the king and high-ranking nobility might provide knives for exclusive dinner guests.

The practice of bringing your own cutlery to dinner started to slowly die out towards the late 16th century as affluent households started to invest in sets of knives that eventually became part of the table setting. Pieter Bruegel the Younger’s paintings of peasants suggest that the custom of carrying a knife or spoon probably continued right into the 17th century for the lower classes in Europe.

A small number of high-quality knives were kept in every great lord’s pantry to be brought out for personal use, as described in *The Boke of Keruynge* (*The Book of Carving*, a 1508 etiquette manual for high-status boys): “Laye your knyues and set your brede one lofe by another/your spones and your napkyns fayre folden besyde your brede.”

Eating forks as we know them today did not catch on in England until the late 17th century. However, trendy Elizabethans served conserved fruit known as ‘wet suckets’ with two-tined sweetmeat forks – the latest culinary invention from trendy Italy.

Brigitte Webster, culinary historian



TOPFOTO

Bakers at work in a 14th-century illustration. They could be fined for selling underweight loaves

How was medieval bread measured and sold?

››› In medieval London, a baker who sold a loaf of bread of low weight could be drawn on a hurdle along Cheapside, the main shopping street, and placed in the pillory for an hour. This public humiliation was one method of enforcing the assize – a consumer-protection measure that adjusted the weight of loaves depending on the price of grain. If corn prices rose, loaves shrank in proportion. In England, loaves were sold for a farthing, a halfpenny or a penny – the smallest coins – so the price could not be changed. On the other hand, the price of ale, also governed by an assize, could rise if grain was scarce.

Thousands of bakers over the whole country broke the rules repeatedly. Even if they tried to obey the law, it required a high level of skill to adjust the size of a piece of dough so that when baked it weighed within a few ounces of the legal limit. The usual punishment was a fine of a few pence – often 4d, a day’s wages. Bakers accepted this as one of the costs of their trade, and it was in effect a tax on their profits.

The governments that introduced and enforced the assize profited from collecting fines, but also aimed to prevent bread riots. Consumers could see the benefits of the assize and witnessed the occasional public shaming of an offender, so they grumbled about the small loaves but did not riot. H

Christopher Dyer, emeritus professor of history, University of Leicester

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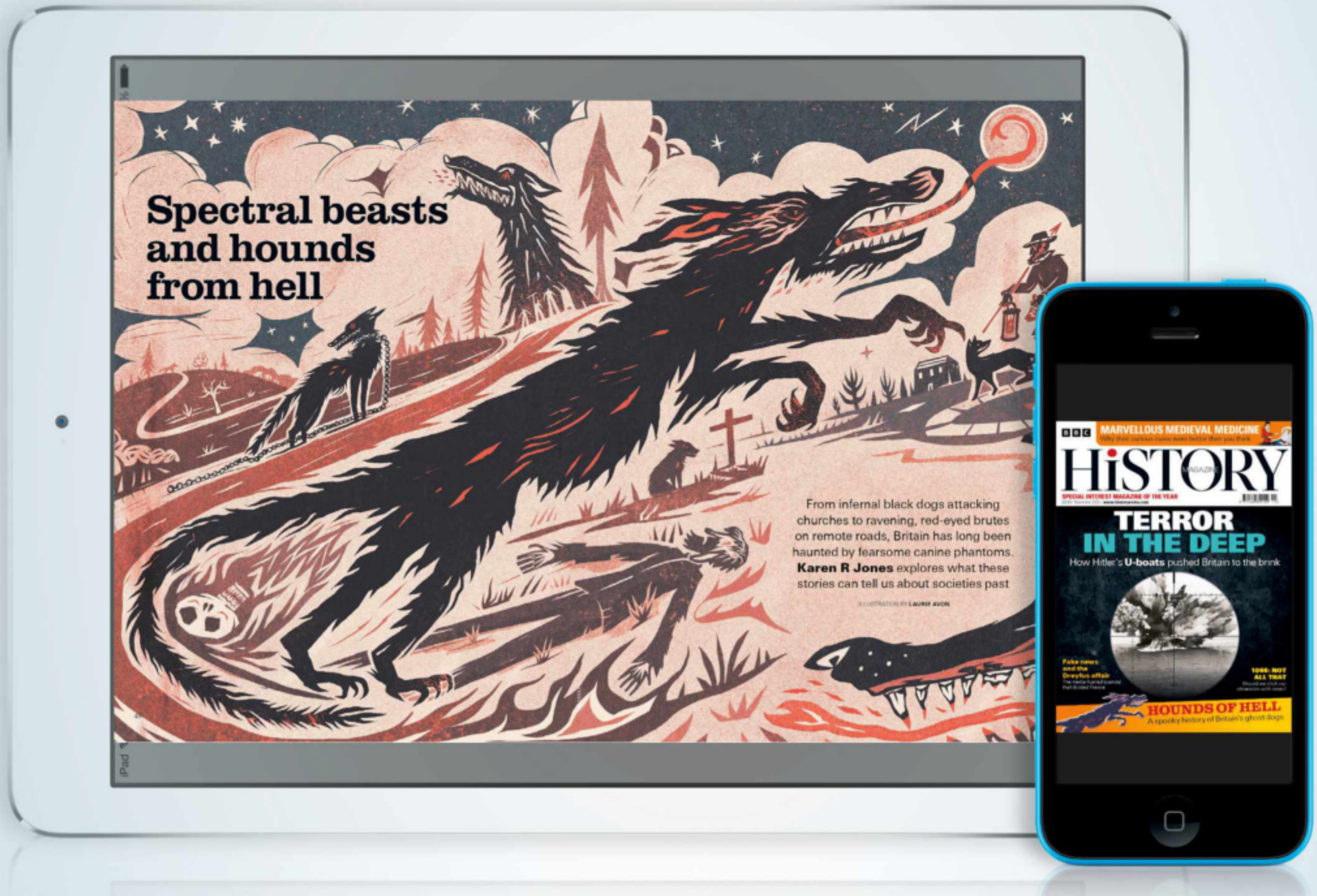

Spectral beasts and hounds from hell

From infernal black dogs attacking churches to ravening, red-eyed brutes on remote roads, Britain has long been haunted by fearsome canine phantoms. **Karen R Jones** explores what these stories can tell us about societies past

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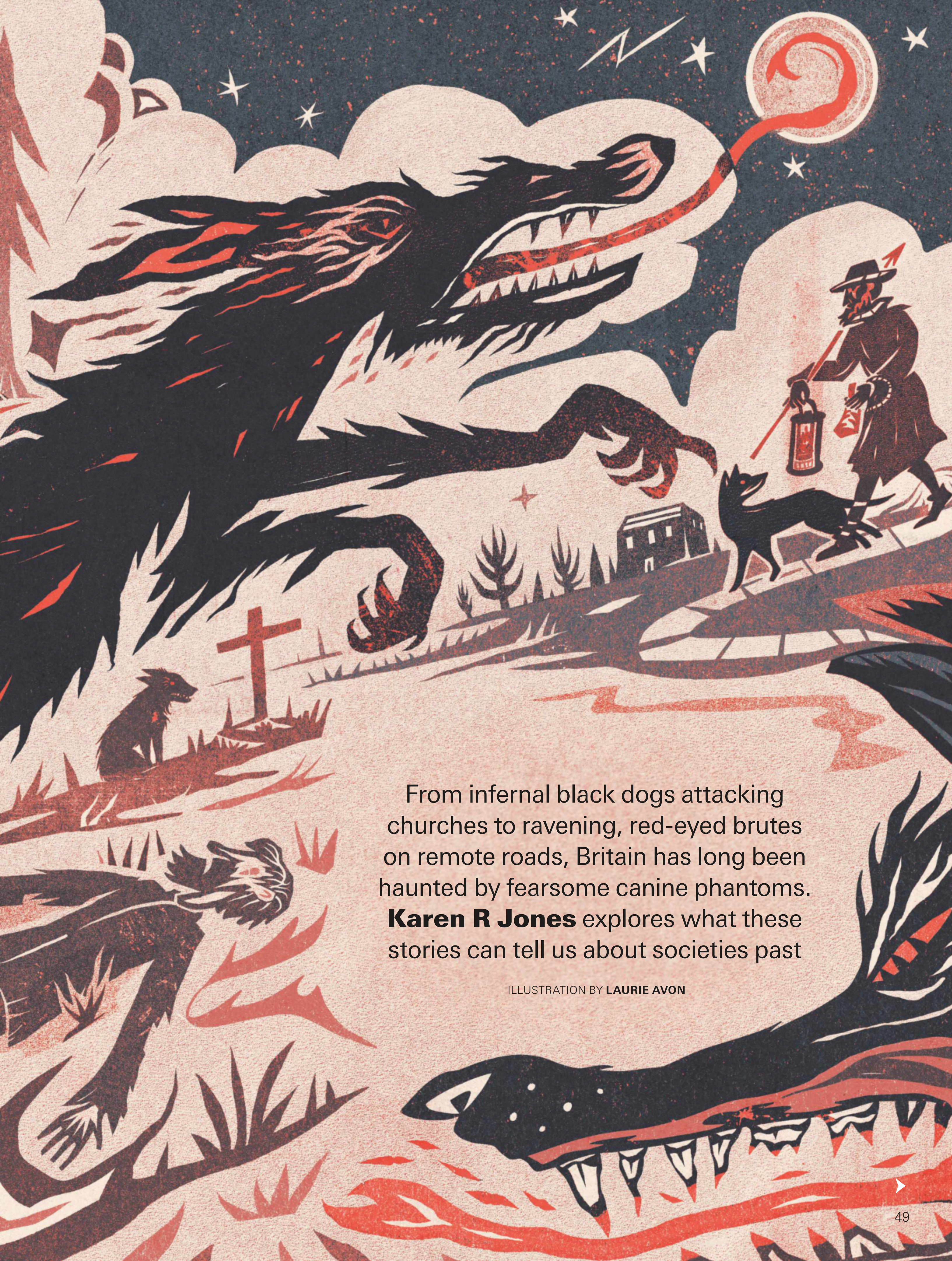
Spectral beasts and hounds from hell



From infernal black dogs attacking churches to ravening, red-eyed brutes on remote roads, Britain has long been haunted by fearsome canine phantoms. **Karen R Jones** explores what these stories can tell us about societies past

ILLUSTRATION BY **LAURIE AVON**

On the morning of 4 August 1577, the good Christian folk of Bungay assembled in St Mary's Church for their regular Sunday service. But more sinister forces were also gathering in the Suffolk town. Dark clouds massed above, then "there fell from heaven an exceeding great and terrible tempest… not simply of raine but also of lightening and thunder".

This storm was only the prelude to a "straunge and terrible Wunder" described by Abraham Fleming in a pamphlet published soon after the event. For the church was plunged into darkness and a "black dog, or the divel in such a likenesse" burst in. It wrung the necks of two worshippers then "passing by an other man of the congregation… gave him such a gripe on the back, that therewith all he was presently drawen togither and shrunk up, as it were a peece of lether scorched in a hot fire".

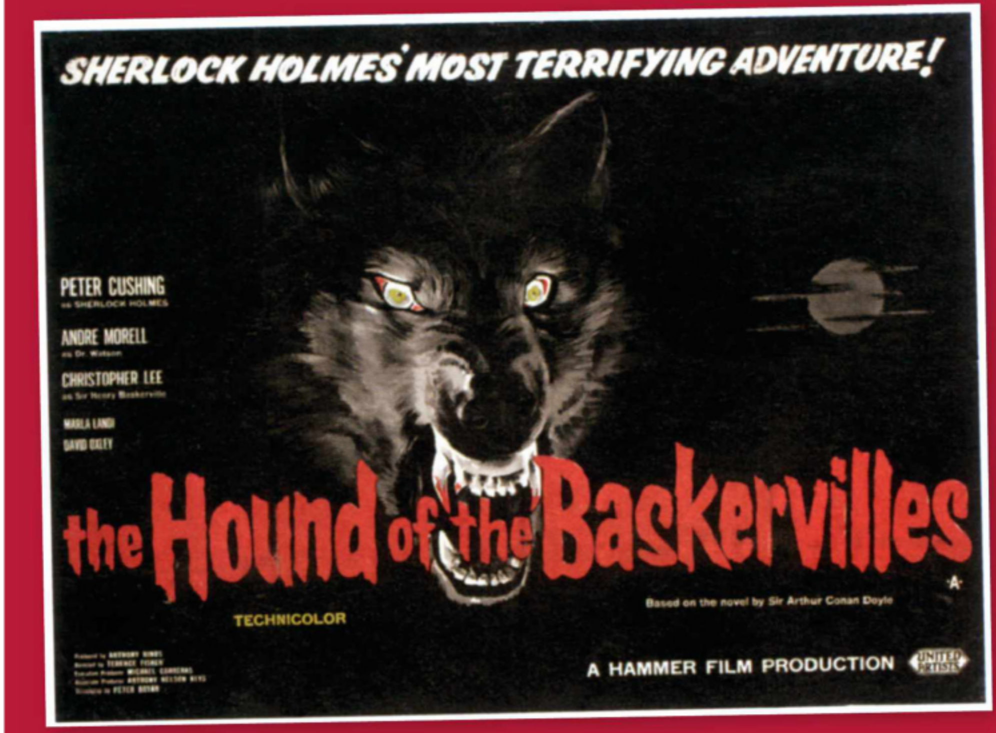
The story of the Black Dog of Bungay is extraordinary, but far from unique in the region – East Anglia is the primary hunting ground of the spectral beast named Black Shuck – and, indeed, across the country.

Britain is, famously, a nation of animal lovers, with 36 per cent of households having at least one dog. The UK canine consumer market is worth around £10bn a year, while millions of us tune in to watch dog-centric television programmes. These animals have become our trusted aides and loyal companions since domesticated dogs arrived on this island with the first human migrants during the Stone Age.

It's not surprising, then, that Britain's population of paranormal pups is more diverse and widespread than anywhere else in the world, according to Mark Norman, a folklorist specialising in black dog apparitions. Such creatures reputedly stalk villages and lonely roads from Aberdeen to Penzance, and the British landscape echoes with their chilling howls.

Hellhound is round the corner

Dogs and humans have lived and travelled together in Britain since the Mesolithic age. Archaeological surveys place dogs at the UK's oldest excavated house – at Star Carr, Yorkshire, dating from around 9000 BC – and at the oldest site of journeying, a camp at Blick Mead near Stonehenge. Dogs


SHERLOCK HOLMES' MOST TERRIFYING ADVENTURE!
PETER CUSHING as SHERLOCK HOLMES
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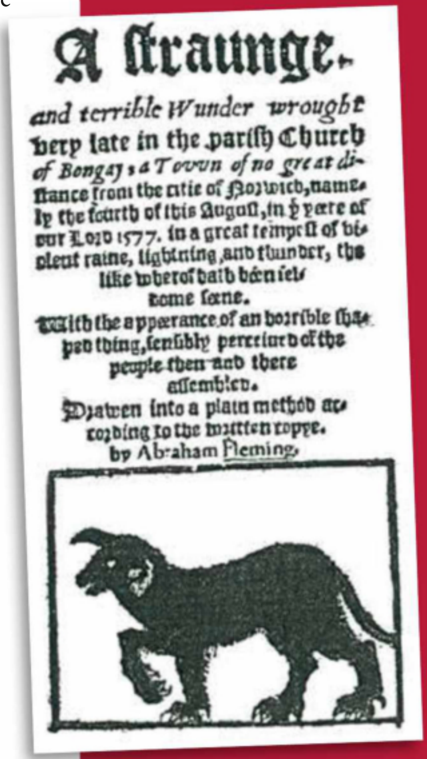
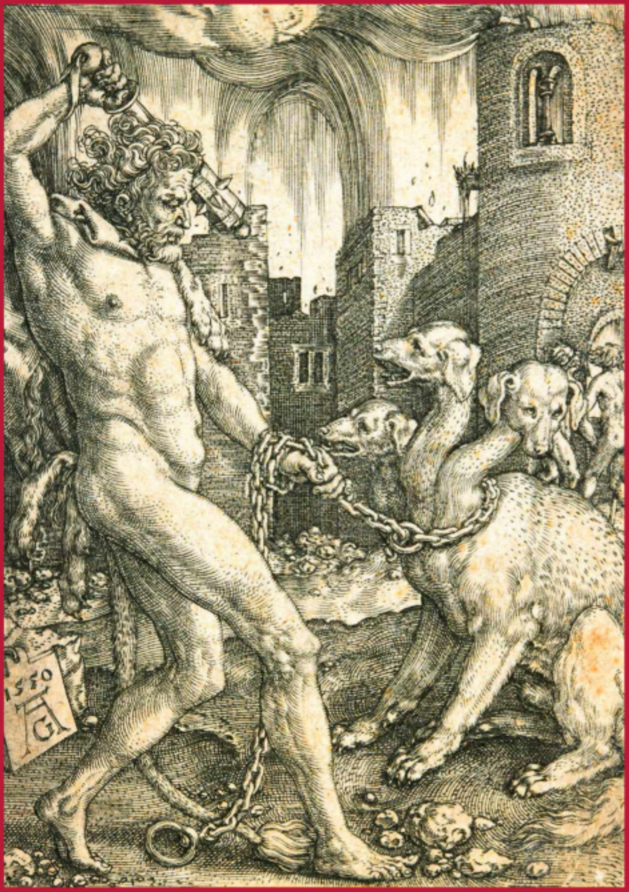
CHRISTOPHER LEE as Sir Henry Baskerville
MARLA LANDI
DAVID OXLEY
the Hound of the Baskervilles
TECHNICOLOR
Based on the novel by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
A HAMMER FILM PRODUCTION

A poster for the 1959 Sherlock Holmes film *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was inspired by tales of ghostly dogs on Dartmoor


A ſtraunge.
and terrible Wunder wrought
very late in the pariſh Church
of Bongay, a Tovvn of no great di-
ſtance from the citie of Norwich, name-
ly the fourth of this Auguſt, in ẏ yeere of
our Lord 1577. in a great tempeſt of vi-
olent raine, lightning, and thunder, the
like whereof hath been ſel-
dome ſeene.
With the appearance of an horrible ſha-
ped thing, ſenſibly perceived of the
people then and there
aſſembled.
Drawen into a plain method ac-
cording to the written copye.
by Abraham Fleming.

A pamphlet by Abraham Fleming about the infernal creature that attacked churchgoers in Bungay in 1577 – one of many tales of black dogs in East Anglia



A 16th-century engraving shows Hercules dragging the three-headed dog Cerberus from the gates of Hades

When is a ghost not a ghost?
Read Martha McGill's exposé of Georgian hoaxes that played on fears of the supernatural at *historyextra.com/ghost-hoaxes*

accompanied pastoralists rounding up sheep in grasslands and joined hunters tracking deer in forests, before settling down to snooze in front of the communal fire. No wonder they also populated ghostly tales.

In story and song, from whispered yarn to local gazetteer, ghost dogs bound across the folkloric and literary record, with perhaps the most famous fictional example being the Hound of the Baskervilles investigated by Sherlock Holmes. In many reported cases, a factual explanation remains deliciously elusive.

All manner of spirit dogs have been reported. Some are devoted pets pining for lost masters and mistresses, padding eternally along the walks they took in life, carrying with them the textured reportage of hearsay, tradition and family fortunes. Some are seen as portents of doom, some relate particular cultural coordinates of injustice, wrongdoing or violent ends, and others just *are*.

Some people who are convinced by such tales claim that these are beasts appearing to us from ancient days – messengers demonstrating the existence of a time-slip or a 'thin place'. The unconvinced retort airily that we like to tell tales – Booker Prize-winning author Graham Swift called humans "storytelling animals" – and that of course those yarns frequently invoke our long-standing companions of homestead and hearthside.

Most of Britain's ghost dogs are connected to specific sites of historical significance where long-standing relationships between humans and canines have been written repeatedly into the material and imagined environment. They haunt village streets, ancient camps, burial mounds and graveyards, historic houses and castles.

Road ragers

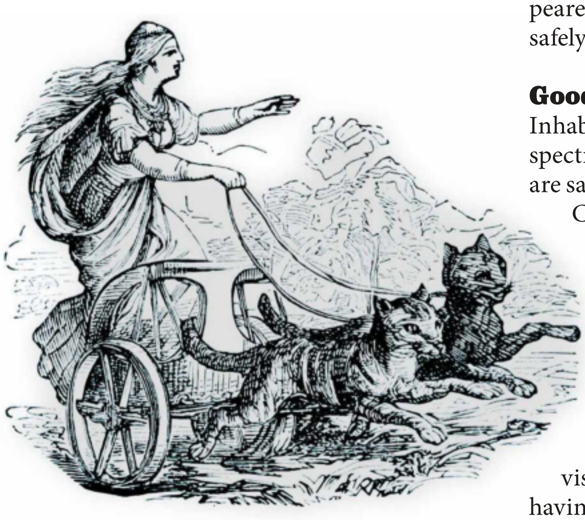
Ancient trackways, roads and paths seem to attract a special breed of spectral beast – black dogs that leap out at unsuspecting travellers on dark, lonely nights. These are the most prolific canine apparitions, accounting for about a third of British sightings. Most of them are large and sport flaming eyes; some clank chains, while others can talk. All are fearsome.

One of the most striking highway hauntings was reported on the road between Tavistock and Okehampton on Dartmoor. Here, on dark nights, the ghost of Lady Howard rode out from her home at Fitzford House in a grisly coach made from the bones of her dead husbands, heading to Okehampton Castle. Running ahead was a hellhound with blazing eyes and a demonic disposition. Sometimes she offered a lift to lost travellers: accept at your peril.

> **Most ghost dogs on roads are large and sport flaming eyes; some clank chains, while others can talk. All are fearsome**

Also on Dartmoor, you might encounter the Wisht Hounds kennelled by the devil in Wistman's Wood. And at the East Dart Hotel, a former coaching inn near Postbridge, a ghostly bloodhound appears each night at 3am to snuffle eagerly at the road outside, hoping to lap up the remnants of discarded booze poured into the gutter by the guilt-ridden landlord, John Webb, over a century ago. The dipsomaniac dog follows the road down the hill to a clapper bridge, eternally searching for the long-discarded grog in the early hours.

Dartmoor epitomises the kind of place where ghost dogs congregate: bleak, lonesome spots where the hairs on the back of your neck stand on end. Dark copses. Craggy peaks. Desolate moors. These are environments that inspire awe and even fear. No wonder they host such beastly apparitions as the Gytrash – a massive dog-spirit frequenting the remote highways of the West Riding of Yorkshire – and the Barghest, a demonic hound with huge teeth and claws roving the darker stretches of the Yorkshire Dales. One Barghest near Whitby sometimes dragged chains behind it, and could vanish into thin air by walking backwards. All were best avoided, auguring bad fortune or death – though they reputedly could not cross rivers.



A woodcut of Freya, a Norse god linked to death, in her cat-drawn chariot. Dogs might warn of her approach

GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY

In Wales, the Cŵn Annwn, or 'hounds of the underworld', were often seen or heard before a funeral, baying mournfully. Typically, they sported glowing red eyes but their appearance otherwise varied depending on where they were seen: they might be huge and white, small and liver-coloured, or even red-coated, dripping with blood. They might rove lonely roads in a pack but sometimes travelled singly, often accompanied by Arawn, Lord of the Underworld and leader of the 'wild hunt'. They were particularly associated with crossroads, enjoyed haunting graves, and often frequented mountains.

These examples reveal much about our complex relationship with wild spaces. Sure, today we seek out these places for forest bathing, wild camping and an escape from modernity. And yet the vestigial unease they inspire in some people is a psychological throwback to our ancient past, when wolves and bears dwelt in uncharted spaces, and when wilderness connoted chaos, a descent into feral madness and devilry. They are places where *Canis familiaris* might revert to its lupine ancestor, *Canis lupus*, transforming from strong and trusty aide into a savage, malevolent assailant.

Not all ghost hounds are out for blood, though. Though most tales about Black Shuck portray his appearance as an omen auguring imminent death or ill fortune, on occasion he struck fenland folk as friendly, and even had a penchant for helping women travellers. And the Gurt Dog of Somerset's Quantock Hills was an entirely affable apparition: a shaggy Samaritan that appeared from the fog to guide lost children safely to their homes.

Good or bad omens?

Inhabited places, too, harbour their share of spectral hounds. Not one but two black dogs are said to wander the grounds of Leeds Castle, Kent (coincidentally home to the world's largest collection of dog collars). One, a portent of doom, first appeared in the 1440s, after Eleanor Cobham, Henry VI's aunt, was tried for witchcraft and incarcerated in the castle. The second, a more benign spectre, is said to bring good luck, and once reputedly saved a visitor from falling out of a window, having attracted their attention by barking. Both are curly coated retriever types, so anyone encountering such a spectre here might struggle to determine whether it is a good or bad omen.

The story of the Black Dog of Newgate was popularised in a sensational 1596 pamphlet describing a canine phantom that stalked the notorious prison. During the reign of Henry III, the yarn goes, inmates of the prison were so hungry that they killed a new arrival, a scholar, and devoured his body. His ghost then wandered the confines of the prison – as did the spectre of a huge black dog. Some prisoners died of fright upon seeing the beast. Others were ripped to pieces by its fearsome jaws in retribution. Even those who escaped the prison were pursued by the avenging animal.

Friend or foe?

Why are dogs the creatures most commonly cited in accounts of animal apparitions? Partly, it's because of their long relationship with and proximity to humans. The dog's alter ego, the wolf, also adds that sense of the fearsome wild into the psychological scare-scape.

There is also a biological factor at play: an awareness that dogs are gifted with extraordinary sensory powers. A dog's nose is equipped with about 300 million olfactory receptors – far more than a human's paltry 5–6 million. Their hearing, too, is vastly superior to our own. These endow them with almost 'supernatural' abilities, reflected in their roles in the beliefs and legends of various cultures worldwide.

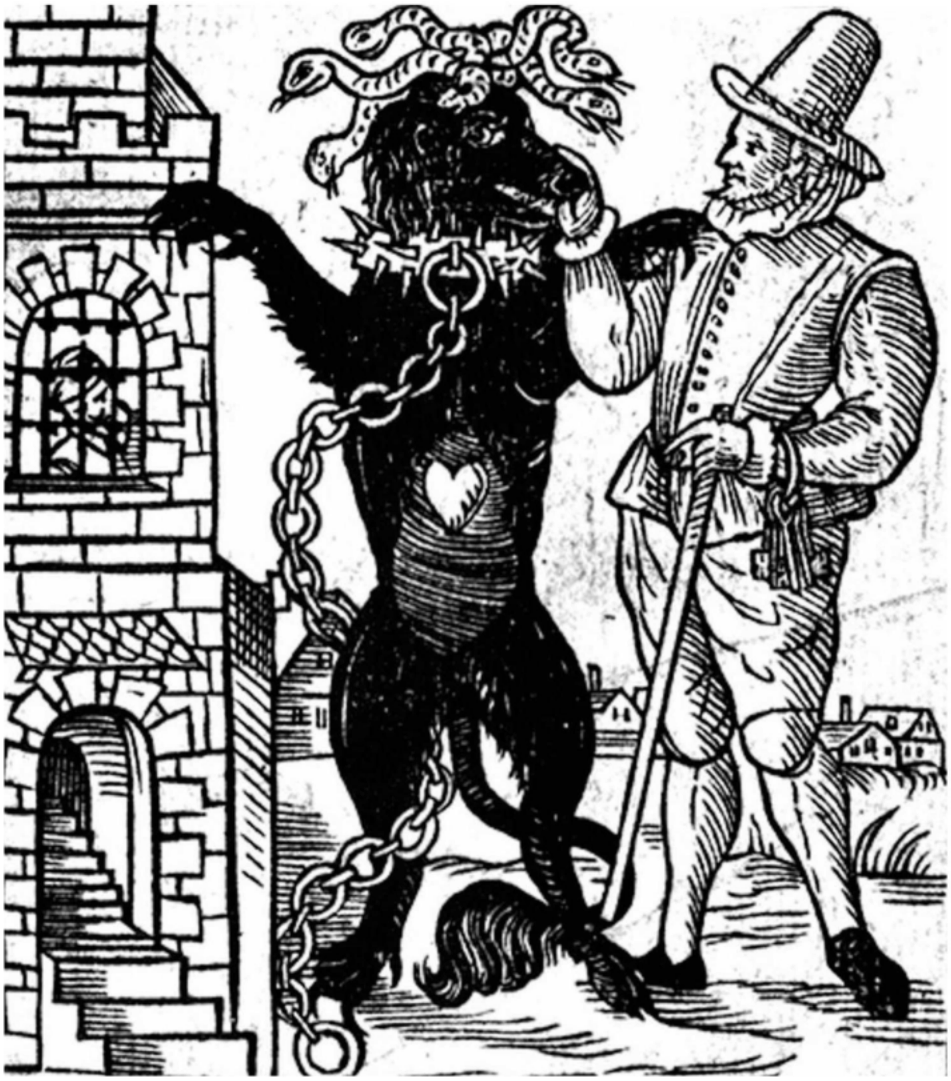
The Aztecs believed that their Xoloitzcuintli dogs could 'smell' ghosts, and thus protect their owners from spirits. In Norse mythology, Freya, a god linked with death, rode a chariot pulled by huge cats – thus a household dog might alert the residents to her approach by howling and barking, potentially averting a fatal incident. And in ancient Greek legend, the three-headed hound Cerberus guarded the entrance to Hades, suggesting that dogs were equipped to patrol the boundary between the living and the dead. Such beliefs in the extrasensory abilities of animals persist: in a 2019 survey for the Blue Cross animal charity, 63 per cent of owners said they believed that their pet had seen (or had the capacity to see) a ghost or other supernatural presence.

Indeed, perhaps the most intriguing part of spectral dog stories is the fact that in many places they are still thriving today. Ghost dogs are seen through the windscreens of cars, stalking major roads just as happily as they did ancient trackways.

Take that infernal assailant in Bungay in 1577. Black Shuck became – and still is – a widespread legend across East Anglia, written into regional folklore by Reverend ES Taylor in a 1850 issue of *Notes and Queries*, describing "Shuck the Dog-fiend… this phantom I have heard many persons in east Norfolk, and even Cambridgeshire, describe as having seen as a black shaggy dog, with fiery eyes and of immense size, and who visits churchyards at midnight".

Paranormal investigators documenting reports of Shuck sightings found that the majority of alleged encounters occurred after 1900 – so, in fact, his presence in the regional psyche appears to have burgeoned rather than receded in the modern age.

Reflecting the continuing salience of this legend, and a broader revival of interest in all matters folkloric, in 2022 a Black Shuck Festival was launched in Bungay to celebrate the town's famous fiendish beast. Perhaps these tales of Shuck and his phantom canine kin have even more relevance in our polarised and fractured society today. They speak of the importance of roots, of the storied pasts that bind humans to other species. And in a time when anthropogenic change threatens us in far-reaching and fundamental ways, they speak of the importance of acknowledging the limits of what we, as humans, can know and control in the natural (or supernatural) world. H



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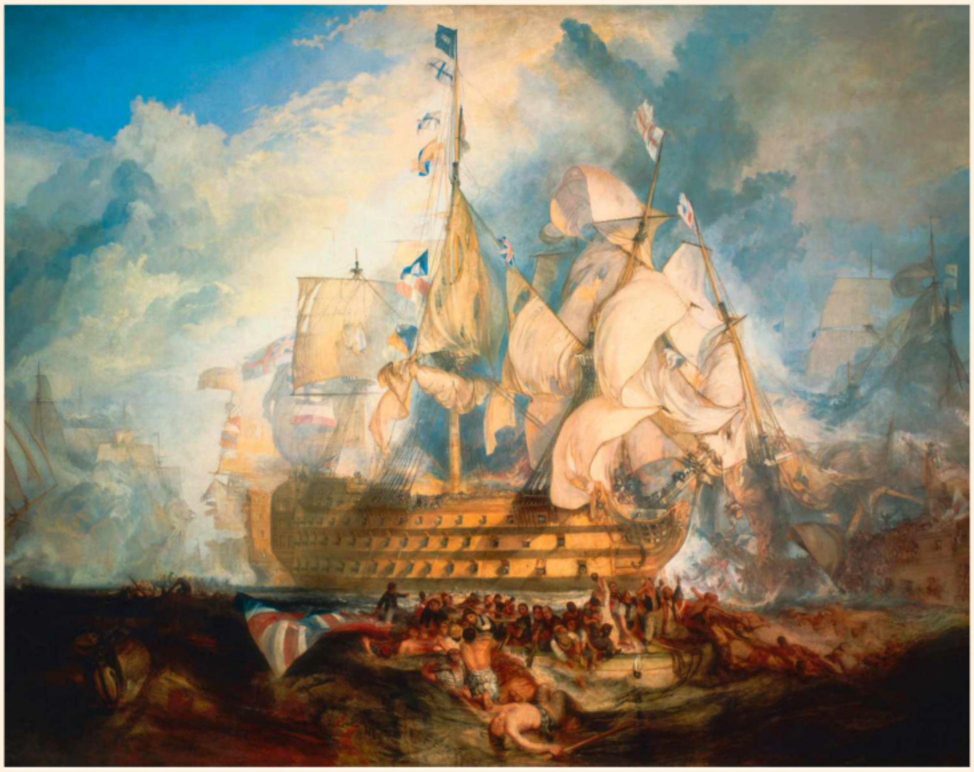
A woodcut of the phantom Black Dog of Newgate. The canine apparition reportedly haunted the precincts of the notorious London prison, attacking inmates who'd killed and eaten a new arrival

In Wales, the Cŵn Annwn, or 'hounds of the underworld', were often seen or heard before a funeral, baying mournfully

Karen R Jones is professor of environmental and cultural history at the University of Kent. Her latest book, *Beastly Britain: An Animal History*, was published in May by Yale University Press



Ship-shaped story JMW Turner's depiction of the 1805 battle of Trafalgar. That naval victory has become a key episode in Britain's national story – but just how significant was its impact in shaping the nation?

Why are we so hung up with historical dates?

From 1066 to 1918, our obsession with battles, elections and even voyages of discovery risks distorting a true understanding of the past

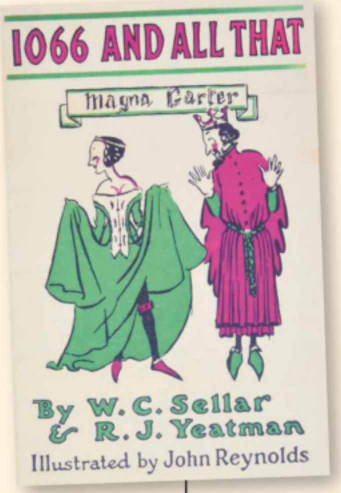
BY **ROBERT BLACKMORE**

ALAMY

In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue. That, at least, is what the famous rhyme tells us. Memorising such dates is a common experience of being taught history – a cliché superbly lampooned by the witty 1930 book *1066 and All That*. "History is not what you thought," its preface suggested. "It is what you can remember." Accordingly, as per its subtitle, it offered a "Memorable History of England, Comprising All the Parts You Can Remember, Including 103 Good Things, 5 Bad Kings and 2 Genuine Dates." Conspicuously, though, "two out of the four dates originally included were eliminated at the last moment" because "they are not memorable."

Though evidently both humorists, the book's authors – *Punch* writers WC Sellar and RJ Yeatman – were making a serious point. History has long been thought to be concerned with preserving the past. The 12th-century historian and Byzantine princess Anna Komnene observed how "time in its irresistible and ceaseless flow carries along on its flood all created things and drowns them in the depths of obscurity". Her solution was the study of history, which "forms a very strong bulwark against the stream of time". This is a powerful idea – one that perhaps moved King Charles I, moments before his execution in January 1649, to utter a last single word to William Juxon, the former bishop of London, instructing him: "Remember."

But do our efforts to remember really require us to do something so trivial as memorising dates? More radically, do the historical events these dates mark even *matter*? The *Oxford English Dictionary* leaves little room for doubt. Its definition of an event is "something that happens or takes place, especially something significant or noteworthy". History is often taught as a succinct sequence of such occurrences – those accepted as important moments, neatly knitted together to explain the present. Indeed, for many historians, especially those preoccupied with political, constitutional or military matters, the practice of history itself involves assessing the importance of events by examining their causes, contexts and consequences, considering how they represent change or continuity over time.



The 1930 book *1066 and All That* wittily parodied the conventional approach to teaching history in schools at that time

Yet almost no archaeologist would approach the past in such terms. Nor would many of today's social, economic or cultural historians. In the 20th century, proponents of the *Annales* school, named for a scholarly journal, famously considered events relatively insignificant. French historian Fernand Braudel (1902–85) argued that events were simply "surface disturbances, crests of foam that the tides of history carry on their strong backs". Has the importance given to events been overstated? Should we, therefore, put less emphasis on learning dates? Are there better ways of understanding history?

The first issue to consider is just how 'important' dates are selected. If we are told that some day or year is more noteworthy than another, who decided this? It would be appealing to be able to say that the established chronology has been objectively selected by balanced, skilled historians, and arrived at through years of scrupulous scholarship and vigorous debate. Yet history is a human thing, written and argued over for all kinds of reasons. Even if such matters are really decided by historians – instead of, say, politicians or poets – we are all equally flawed, prone to error and liable to misinterpret the past through a panoply of biases, conscious or not. Moreover, humans are social animals and have consequently evolved to value convention, tradition and the received wisdom of our ancestors. Most of us simply accept the established chronology.

Such a shared history can indeed function as a powerful bond cementing the otherwise disparate identities of social groups. To reinforce this sense of the collective, past incidents thought worthy of remembrance were once upon a time written in stone – literally. The Parian Marble, a fragment of a stele found on the island of Paros and now displayed in the ancient Greek section of Oxford's Ashmolean Museum, is inscribed with a neat chronology of events and their dates from 1582 BC to 299 BC in our terms. These include the fall of Troy, purportedly in 1209–1208 BC, and the rather more reliably dated battle of Marathon in 490 BC. The stele's text, similar to the earlier 'Sumerian King List' housed in the nearby Mesopotamian gallery, fuses myth with history.

Such objects represent early examples of a phenomenon that has become increasingly common in the past two centuries or so. With the rise of nation states, backstories have been created for their "imagined communities", as Anglo-Irish political scientist Benedict Anderson famously dubbed nations in 1983. These stories typically rest on simple historical narratives, ideally sprinkled with a few inspirational national heroes and some key dates. In the UK, a chronology of past rulers plays a major role. Reigns became surrogates for eras, suffused with each ruler's character. Looking back, for example, we see all those who were alive between 1837 and 1901 as 'Victorians'.

Battles are often key parts of national stories. Like Marathon for the ancient Greeks, the battles of Hastings in 1066 and Agincourt in 1415 are considered important to the English. For the British more generally, Trafalgar in

AMAZON

Golden age Was there ever a ‘best time in history to be alive’? Read Robert Blackmore’s article challenging this idea on our website: *historyextra.com/best-time-alive*

Battles for nations
A 2017 re-enactment of the 1410 battle of Grunwald. Poles and Lithuanians see this victory over the German Teutonic Order as a turning point in their national stories

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1805 and Waterloo in 1815 are significant. In Serbia, the notoriously bloody battle of Kosovo in 1389, in which forces led by Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović squared up to an invading Ottoman army under the command of Sultan Murad I, has been endlessly mythologised. Lithuanians and Poles still celebrate victory over the German Teutonic Order at the battle of Grunwald in 1410.

But few dates and events are as significant as national narratives suggest, battles least of all. Why? Because battles, though certainly rare and dramatic moments, are seldom, if ever, decisive at ending wars so can’t be imbued with much causal importance. Even after Hastings, at which much of the English ruling class was killed, it took William the Conqueror many years to bring England truly under Norman rule, a period notorious for the so-called Harrying of the North (1069–70). Likewise, the greatly celebrated clash at Agincourt (1415), which owes much of its fame to William Shakespeare, saw the mass slaughter of French nobility – but it was not until 1420 that Henry V forced Charles VI to agree to recognise the Plantagenet claim to the French throne under the Treaty of Troyes.

Yet such totemic dates are repeatedly reinforced by that staple of public history and national myth-making: the commemoration of anniversaries. These appear to be good moments to reconsider the past and revive enthusiasm for historical enquiry, but there’s a built-in problem: at least outwardly, nobody involved questions the real significance of the events marked – that would defeat the exercise. It is understandable that, on occasion, people wish to memorialise the loss of their loved ones in wars or other disasters. In general, however, anniversaries reflect current concerns and as such are profoundly unhelpful when it comes to understanding what happened in the past.

Admittedly, some moments appear to have been so overwhelmingly important that they demand our attention. For Europe, the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453 seems epochal. In China, the final defeat of the Song dynasty by the forces of Kublai Khan in 1279 has a similar significance. Yet these events represent the culmination of long and complex processes. Seen in this light, the events themselves were largely symbolic.

Surely, you say, the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the Americas in 1492 had massive historical consequences. Well, one can quibble over whether his first voyage itself achieved much – likewise his three further transatlantic expeditions in 1493–96, 1498–1500 and 1502–04, for that matter – despite being catastrophic for the

> **“We are all equally flawed, prone to error and liable to misinterpret the past through a panoply of biases**

“During the Armada many English sailors were more preoccupied with selling supplies to the enemy than with fighting them

indigenous Taíno people of the Caribbean. Columbus thought – and continued to think for the rest of his life – that he was exploring east Asia.

The world indeed changed thereafter as it gradually fused into what, in 1974, the American economic historian and sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein termed the “modern world-system”, but this was not an inevitable consequence of Columbus’s first voyage. After all, Europeans had been in the Americas before. The Norseman Leif Erikson is thought to have reached North America around AD 1000, and a Norse settlement excavated at L’Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland, Canada seems to support this. So it is of far greater historical significance that pivotal *processes* occurred after 1492 – but not after 1000. This is a point made in Alfred W Crosby’s groundbreaking 1972 book *The Columbian Exchange*, a foundational text of environmental history that charted the seismic global effects of the intercontinental transfer of plants, animals, diseases and cultures.

Such developments can be shown to be genuinely transformative to people’s lives, from the food they ate to the diseases that afflicted them. By contrast, traditional chronology often neglects the experiences of a broad spectrum of people. Not everyone was present at battles or on voyages of discovery. Indeed, most humans who have ever lived were peasants who wrested their subsistence from the soil. For these people, few experiences were shared beyond a restricted locality, especially in periods when speeds of travel were slow and communication limited. Nearly all people must have been ignorant of what we now assert, after the fact, were key events.

Others would have been simply indifferent. According to the historian De Lamar Jennsen, the Spanish Armada – King Philip II of Spain’s unsuccessful project to invade England in summer 1588 – was the “worst kept secret in Europe”. Yet research suggests that, far from striving to achieve victory for their country in some epic national struggle, during the Armada many English sailors and merchants were more preoccupied with selling food and other supplies to the enemy than with fighting them.

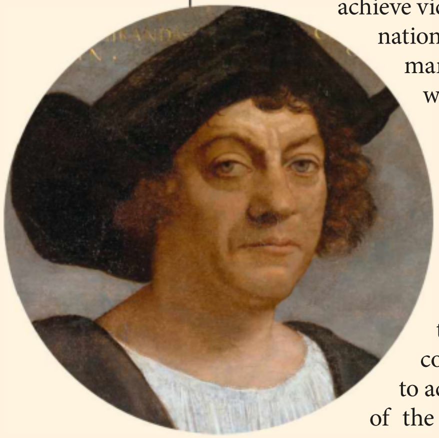
Perhaps the key problem is that narrative history gives us a false sense of order, in part by playing to our innate tendency to identify and interpret patterns. It suggests that big events necessarily have big consequences. This completely fails to account for the unpredictable nature of the world through which we move. Seemingly insignificant factors can and do have a disproportionate impact on history. As the proverb has it in James Baldwin’s version: “For want of a nail the shoe was lost; for want of a shoe the horse was lost; for the want of a horse the battle was lost; for the failure of battle the kingdom was lost; and all for the want of a horseshoe nail.” Conversely, apparently important things can turn out to be irrelevant.

To return to Columbus, how are we to frame the decision of Queen Isabella I of Castile and King Ferdinand II of Aragon to support him, having equivocated for years over whether to stump up the cash to fund his voyage west? Some cite the fall of Granada to Christian forces in January 1492 – marking the end of Islamic rule on the Iberian peninsula, which gave the co-ruler monarchs both confidence and the promise of more secure finances – as the key explanation for their change of heart. Assuming this were true, we could equally portray what happened as the result of the Arab Nasrid dynasty, which ruled the Emirate of Granada for more than 250 years, carelessly losing control of their territory. In the latter reading, Wallerstein’s modern world-system was in a sense created “for want of a nail”.

As should be becoming clear, questioning the assumptions that underpin so much conventional narrative history has serious implications. This forces you, for example, to recognise that the lowliest peasant may have been as significant as an emperor or king, and that their relative impact on history was not necessarily proportionate to their immediate influence. “The ruler’s power was rarely effective,” Danish historian Patricia Crone put it, “even within such sphere of competence as he did enjoy.” Braudel hauntingly evoked a “historian who takes a seat in Philip II’s chair and reads his papers” and is transported into “a world of strong passions” but one “unconscious of the deeper realities of history, of the running waters on which our frail barks are tossed like cockleshells”. Yet such is our wish to impose order on a complex world that we have frequently reached for elaborate explanations for erratic ‘nonlinear’ outcomes, among them the capricious will of deities, the movements of celestial bodies, even conspiracy theories.

In truth, because our evidence of the past is so incomplete, we are unlikely ever to pinpoint true cause and effect. Despite this, we still tend to look for what *Annales* school historian Marc Bloch called “the idol of origins”. Countless books claim to trace the roots of anything from states and religions to sports. Even the aforesaid Parian Marble located the birth of agriculture to 1409–08 BC when the goddess Demeter supposedly invented grain crops. In practical terms, though, nothing has any origin in history. “For most historical realities,” Bloch wrote in the early 1940s, “the very notion of a starting point remains singularly elusive.” As we have shown, we cannot even be sure that the origin of the Columbian Exchange was Columbus himself.

Indeed, trying to frame this story, we could be more radical and go back even before the time of Leif Erikson –



This 1519 portrait reputedly depicts Christopher Columbus. Did his first transatlantic voyage in 1492 really have such world-changing consequences?

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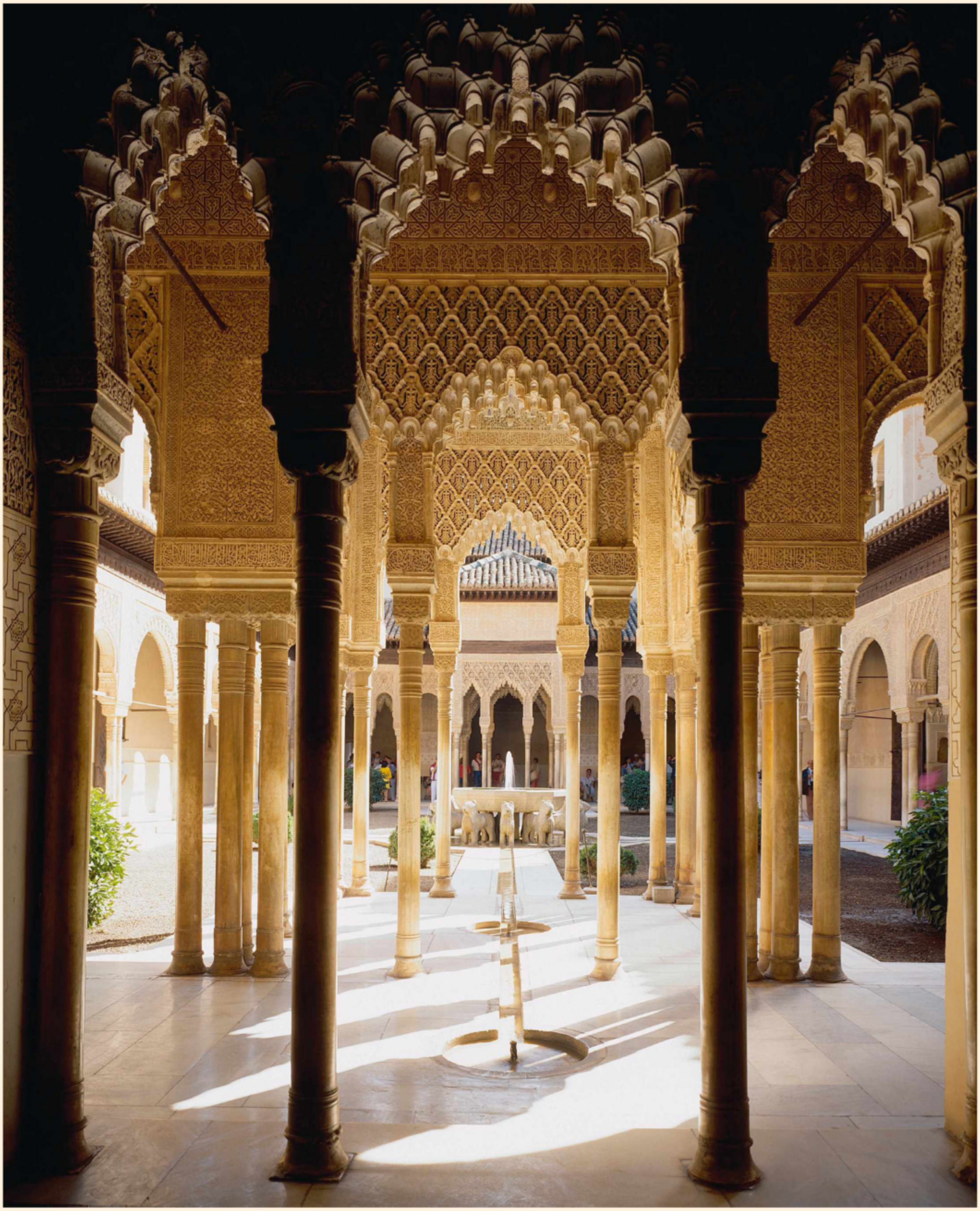

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Moment that mattered? The Court of the Lions in the Alhambra, Granada. That city's fall in January 1492 arguably led to the European colonisation of the Americas. But it's an episode that can be framed in different ways, argues Robert Blackmore perhaps all the way back to 14,800 years ago, when the Bering Strait Land Bridge was last rendered impassable and Asia was fully separated from the Americas. But where do you stop? Rather than there being actual origins, all things were and are constantly in the course of being made through a process of emergence. As Bloch argued, "A historical phenomenon can never be understood apart from its moment in time. This is true of every evolutionary stage, our own and all others."

So how, then, are we to approach history without straightforward narratives? There are any number of options. Some historians, such as those of the *Annales* school, have examined historical structures – social, political and economic – rather than events to explain change, frequently over the long term. This approach has often been fused with the so-called *histoire des mentalités* (history of attitudes), which endeavours to understand the perspectives of those in the past in their own terms. Meanwhile, some social and economic historians have used Marxist theory and framed conflict between social classes as explaining change. Others have put the emphasis on demography and land use. Today, in a time of climate change, many historians are interested in understanding past societies' interactions with their environments.

Each new approach has inevitably attracted criticism for its own alleged oversimplification and misrepresentation of the past. British historians, in particular, were notoriously hostile to the *Annales* school. Geoffrey Elton of the University of Cambridge, for example, held to his focus on events, with disdain for nearly all scholarship outside the study of power politics. It is said that his colleague Maurice Cowling would privately exclaim: "*Annales* is balls!" Despite such intransigence, though, new ideas did spread. Going forward, future historians will doubtless find even more innovative forms of historical enquiry using formidable artificial intelligence-driven tools.

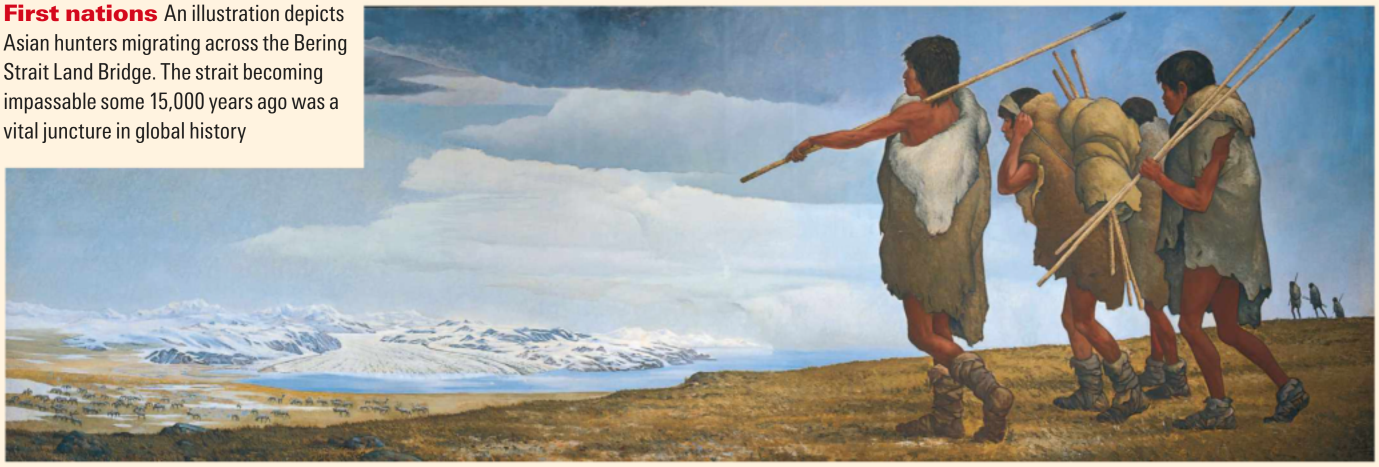
To be clear, though they make less of specific events, new approaches are not necessarily histories *without* dates. Peter Laslett, in his pioneering 1965 work of social history *The World We Have Lost*, even began with one: "In the year 1619 the bakers of London applied to the authorities for an increase in the price of bread." Though Laslett pinpoints a moment that might seem banal when compared with a great battle, coronation or discovery, we should arguably accord such granular details equal attention for what they tell us of our ancestors' priorities. Their world, like our own, was a practically infinite morass of events and dates whose relative importance and interrelationships were vastly more uncertain than we impulsively suppose.

History is not, as one student in Alan Bennett's 2004 play *The History Boys* put it, "just one f****** thing after another". Rather, as the sixth-century historian and bishop Gregory of Tours began his *Historia Francorum* (History of the Franks), "A great many things keep happening." Faced with this truth, should we not stop presenting history as neat, ordered and, as such, unrepresentative of how our forebears experienced it?

Ultimately, we cannot preserve the past inside the present. Explorers such as Columbus and rulers such as Charles I or Philip II *will* eventually be forgotten, just as we will all one day be swept away by the stream of time. Trying to understand this process, not learning dates, is the true art of history. Kings and queens are not innately important; neither are great battles. All things are transient. As the 11–12th-century Persian poet and scientist Omar Khayyam put it, it is far better we "think, in this batter'd caravanserai [a refuge for travellers] whose doorways are alternate night and day; how sultan after sultan with his pomp, abode his hour or two, and went his way". H

> **" We will all one day be swept away by the stream of time. Trying to understand this process is the true art of history**

Dr Robert Blackmore is a historian and a visiting fellow at the University of Southampton



First nations An illustration depicts Asian hunters migrating across the Bering Strait Land Bridge. The strait becoming impassable some 15,000 years ago was a vital juncture in global history

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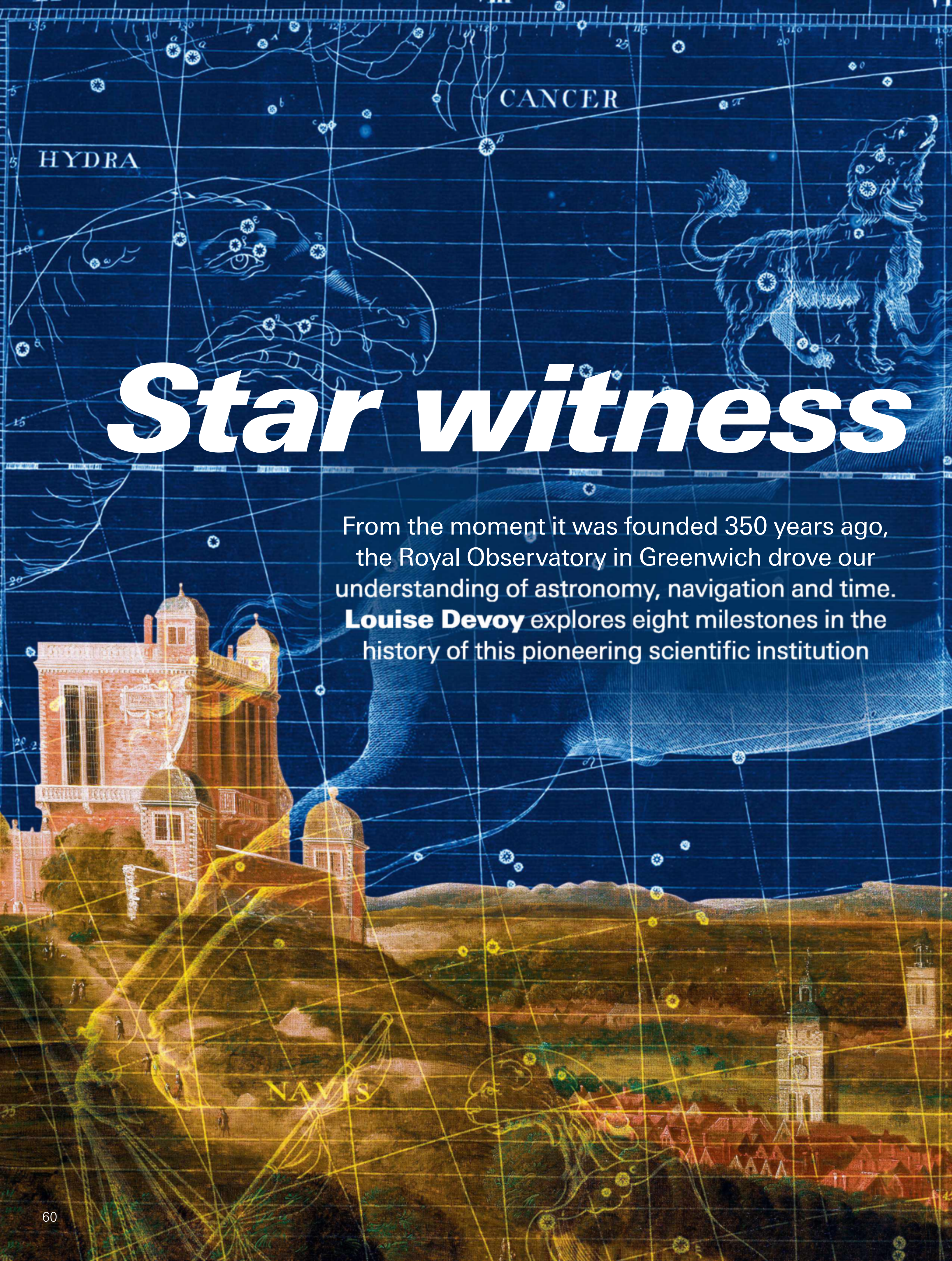


Star witness

From the moment it was founded 350 years ago, the Royal Observatory in Greenwich drove our understanding of astronomy, navigation and time. **Louise Devoy** explores eight milestones in the history of this pioneering scientific institution

The big bang moment

1675 CHARLES II SPARKS A STAR-GAZING REVOLUTION

In the 17th century, the great maritime nations were vying to solve a puzzle that had confounded philosophers for many centuries: how to determine exact positions on the Earth's surface. And in Britain, Charles II took a major step to ensure his realm's position at the head of the pack.

On 4 March 1675, the king signed a royal warrant appointing John Flamsteed as the first "astronomical observator", tasked with "perfecting the art of navigation".

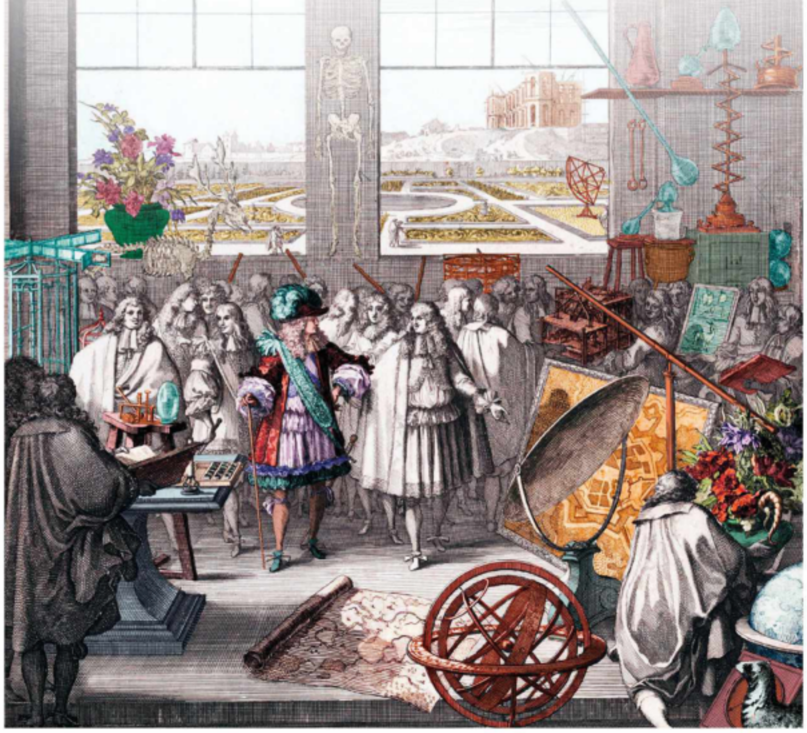
Flamsteed's specific objective was to devise a method by which sailors could establish their longitude (east–west position) at sea – which involved measuring the positions of celestial bodies – and of knowing the time at a ship's local position. And Flamsteed would get to carry out this vital research from the surroundings of the country's first state-funded, purpose-built scientific institution: the Royal Observatory.

It was urgent work, because England's great rival, France, had stolen a march: Louis XIV had established an observatory in Paris nearly a decade earlier. Flamsteed was, in effect, playing catch-up.

The size of the task facing the astronomer clearly wasn't lost on Charles II, for the king appointed none other than the celebrated architect Christopher Wren to design the observatory. Wren's chosen site was the hilltop ruins of Greenwich Castle – and it was here that the foundation stone was laid on 10 August 1675.

With its lofty windows, royal portraits and accurate pendulum clocks, the octagonal 'star chamber', completed in 1676, was grand in appearance. Unfortunately, it was also unsuitable for mapping the stars, as it was 13.5° askew from the meridian, an imaginary north-south line connecting the poles. So Wren designed another building nearby. This one would last for the remainder of Flamsteed's tenure, before being demolished, rebuilt and extended as the Meridian Observatory.

As for Flamsteed, he went on to conceive Greenwich Mean Time (GMT), by which he produced an average ('mean') 24-hour day that could be tracked using a mechanical clock year round. And that, as we'll see on page 64, would have ramifications across the planet.



King Louis XIV visits the Royal Academy of Sciences in Paris in 1671. The creation of an observatory in the French capital had left England playing catch-up

ROYAL MUSEUMS GREENWICH/GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY

Dressed for success

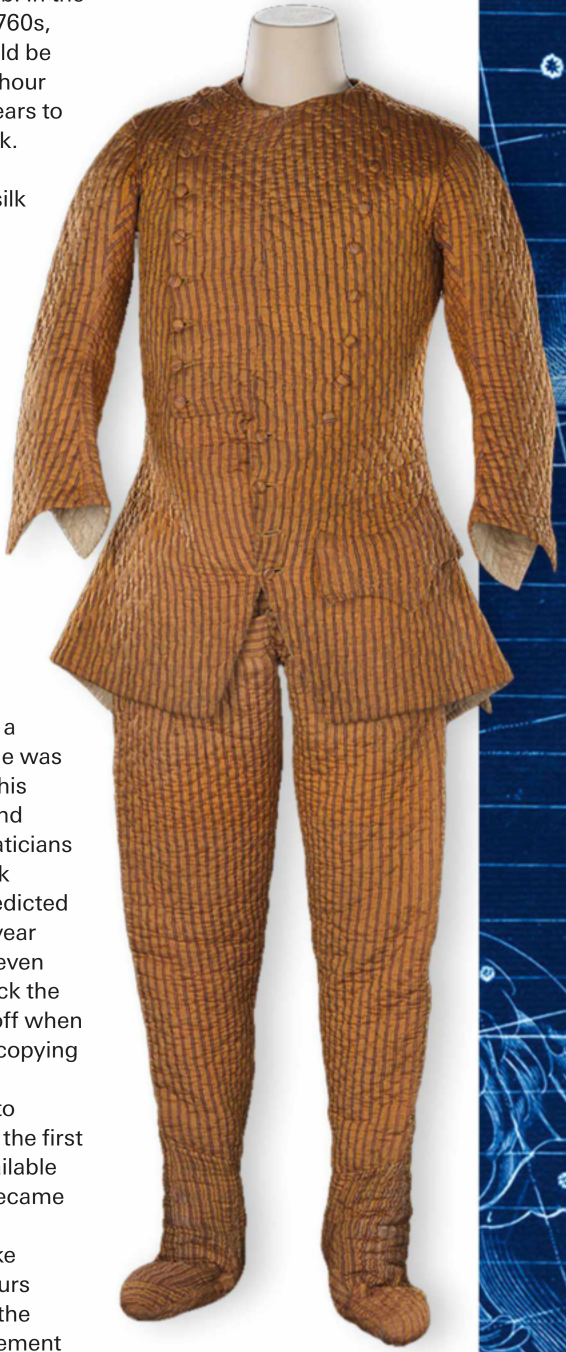
1767 HOW A MAN IN A PADDED SUIT TRANSFORMED THE ART OF NAVIGATION

No one could accuse Nevil Maskelyne of not being dedicated to his job. In the dead of night across the mid-1760s, the fifth Astronomer Royal could be found staring up at the sky for hour upon hour, while straining his ears to hear the beats of a nearby clock.

Dressed in an extravagant padded suit made from wool, silk and linen, Maskelyne was prepared for all that a British winter could throw at him. Not even perishing temperatures could stand in the way of the task in hand: to devise a 'lunar distance method' to calculate longitude at sea. This technique required mariners to measure the angular distance between the moon and a specific star, then compare it to Greenwich time. And they all used data gleaned from Maskelyne's meticulous study of the movement of the stars.

This was, however, far from a one-man endeavour. Maskelyne was joined on his freezing vigils by his assistant, David Kinnebrook, and enlisted a network of mathematicians – dubbed 'computers' – to work remotely on calculating the predicted position of the moon over the year ahead. The Astronomer Royal even had a team of 'comparers' check the computers' work (which paid off when two of them were found to be copying one another's work).

All this enabled Maskelyne to produce the *Nautical Almanac*, the first edition of which was made available on 6 January 1767. It quickly became an essential tool in navigation, reducing the time taken to make longitude calculations from hours to minutes. Updated annually, the *Almanac* became a required element of navigators' training, and set the trend for mariners to calculate their position relative to Greenwich.



Astronomer Royal Nevil Maskelyne wore this wool, silk and linen suit to ward off the perishing cold while studying the stars

High standards

1833 A CURIOUS METAL SPHERE REGULATES CLOCKS

It can be seen from miles around – and with good reason. Sitting atop the Royal Observatory is a large red, metal ball that rises to the top of a mast at the same time every day, and drops a few minutes later. For those who haven't set eyes on it before, it makes for a strange sight. But what is it there for?

To answer that question, we need to rewind to 1764 when John Harrison, the celebrated English clockmaker, sent his fourth marine timekeeper, later known as 'H4', on a trial voyage to Barbados. The clock performed exceptionally well, losing a mere 39.2 seconds over 47 days at sea. To Harrison's delight, it proved that such devices could provide mariners accurate reference times for calculating longitude.

Other clockmakers developed Harrison's innovative ideas into a standard design that was cheaper and easier to reproduce. By the 1820s, the 'marine chronometer' was being used on both

ROYAL MUSEUMS GREENWICH

The time ball was installed on the turret of Flamsteed House at the Royal Observatory in 1833. It dropped at 1pm each day, enabling mariners to check their on-board chronometers

commercial and Royal Navy ships. But these chronometers only worked if they were telling the correct time when ships left port. That's where the Greenwich 'time ball' came in.

A time ball is a large spherical device that drops at a predetermined time of day, enabling mariners to set their clocks by it. The first modern example of this technology was erected in Portsmouth in 1829. Greenwich's, however, would be the most famous. It was installed in 1833 on Flamsteed House, at the heart of the Observatory, providing maximum visibility from the Thames. Ever since, it has risen halfway up the mast at 12.55pm, climbed to the top at 12.58pm and then dropped at precisely 1pm GMT.

Soon time balls were appearing at harbours and observatories around the globe, meaning that mariners could check their chronometers against accurate clocks, even during the longest of voyages.

DREAMSTIME/GETTY IMAGES

Making time Watch our video exploring the history of GMT, filmed at the Observatory, at *youtube.com/historyextra*

HOW DID WE UNIFY TIME?

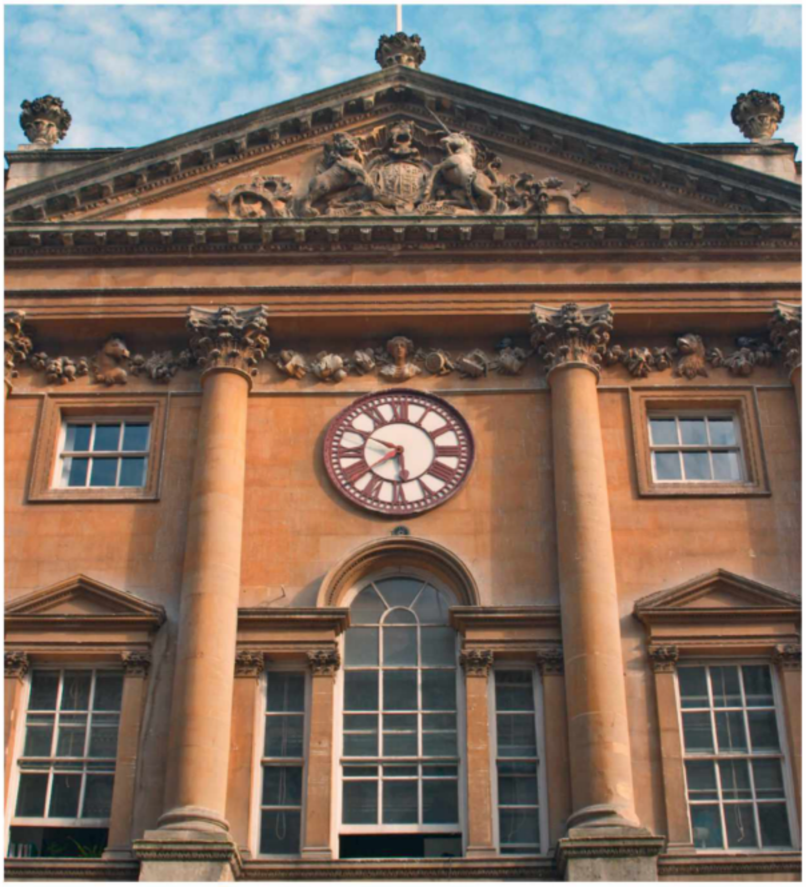
Timetable drama

1852 GREENWICH RIDES TO THE RAILWAYS' RESCUE

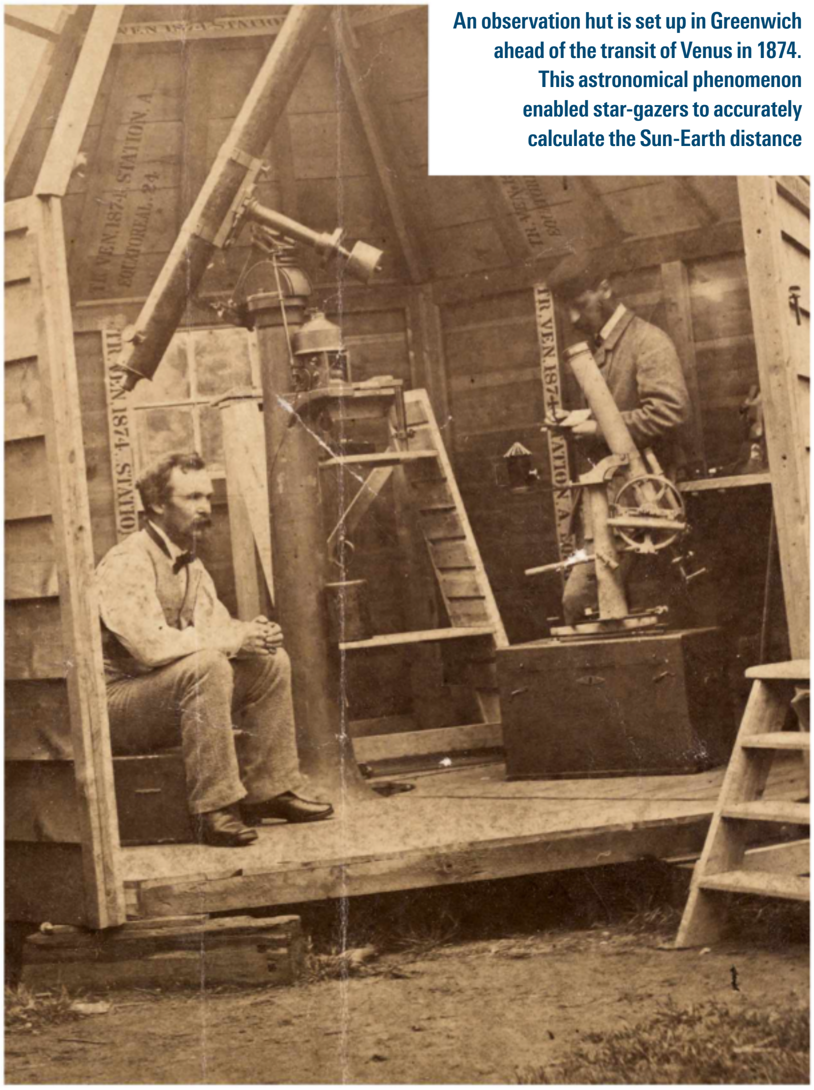
Take a stroll down Corn Street in the heart of Bristol and you'll come across a clock mounted to the wall of the city's old corn exchange. There's nothing unusual about that, you may think. But take a closer look and you'll notice that this elegant 1820s timepiece has two hands for minutes: a red one for GMT and a black one for local Bristol time. The clock is a curious snapshot of a bygone age, and also a marker of a technological conundrum that the Royal Observatory played a central role in solving.

The mid-19th century was very much the age of the railways – by the 1840s tracks were snaking across the country. This was all well and good. But when, in 1847, the railway companies decided to coordinate their timetables across Britain using GMT, they ran into a problem. Back then, Britain's cities relied on local times set by sundials, varying by as much as 30 minutes between west and east. So how could the railway companies ensure that these times were perfectly aligned?

Enter George Biddell Airy, the seventh Astronomer Royal. Airy reasoned that a new technology – that of sending impulses via telegraph wires to a series of synchronised dials – could provide a solution. And so he ordered a new timepiece – the Shepherd Motor Clock – to be installed at the Royal Observatory. From 1852, the clock began sending daily time signals to railway stations across London and Kent, along with hourly signals to the Electric Telegraph Company on London's Strand for national distribution. Train travel would never be the same again and, by 1880, GMT had been embraced as Britain's legal Civil Time.



With its three hands, the clock on Bristol's Corn Exchange offers a snapshot of an age when Britain's cities relied on a variety of local times



An observation hut is set up in Greenwich ahead of the transit of Venus in 1874. This astronomical phenomenon enabled star-gazers to accurately calculate the Sun-Earth distance

A moment in the sun

1874 GREENWICH LEADS THE RACE TO RECORD THE TRANSIT OF VENUS

For astronomers everywhere, 9 December 1874 was like Christmas come early. Star gazers counted down the days to this landmark date, while George Biddell Airy ordered expeditions to Egypt, New Zealand and the Indian Ocean to observe the amazing event unfolding overhead.

That event was a transit of Venus, a rare astronomical phenomenon in which the planet appears to cross the Sun as a slow-moving black dot. This was the first time that the transit had occurred since 1769, and the first such event since the invention of photography in the 1820s. Little wonder astronomers were excited.

And their excitement was justified. By timing the transit's key moments as seen from different locations on Earth, star gazers can measure the Sun–Earth distance, known as the 'astronomical unit'. This yardstick (just under 93 million miles) is still used by scientists today.

Ahead of the 1874 transit, Airy ordered special telescopes known as photoheliographs to project the Sun's disc onto glass plates. However, his teams struggled with the kit, and the photoheliographs failed to capture the transit with any great accuracy.

Despite those issues, the transit of Venus inspired a renewed interest in sun studies. Greenwich assistant EW Maunder started to compile a daily record of sunspot observations. In 1904, Maunder and his wife, Annie, assembled 30 years of sunspot data into the 'butterfly diagram' that still underpins our understanding of the Sun's 11-year magnetic cycle.

A degree of certainty

1884 THE WORLD ALIGNS ITSELF TO GREENWICH

Delegates at the 1884 International Meridian Conference agreed to use the Greenwich meridian as 0° longitude

John Flamsteed had been dead for more than a century. Yet, on 13 October 1884, his great brainchild, Greenwich Mean Time, truly went global. On that day, delegates at the International Meridian Conference in Washington, DC voted in favour of making Greenwich the world's prime meridian, or 0° longitude.

The decision was influenced by a combination of technological supremacy and pragmatism. Greenwich was one of only four observatories with a suitably accurate telescope – the Airy Transit Circle Telescope – to define a meridian. And more than 70 per cent of shipping companies by tonnage already relied on the Greenwich meridian.

The delegates also agreed that the Universal Day – a 24-hour period to be used as a common reference to record events around the world – should begin at midnight GMT on the Greenwich meridian. This would hardly have come as a surprise: a year earlier, railroads in the US had already agreed to use standard time zones based on hourly meridians from Greenwich.

The delegates assembled in the American capital that October day voted overwhelmingly in favour of the Universal Day, and countries started to define their own standard time zones as hourly intervals before or after Greenwich. The result was the familiar time-zone system we use today.

ROYAL MUSEUMS GREENWICH/ALAMY

Seeing double

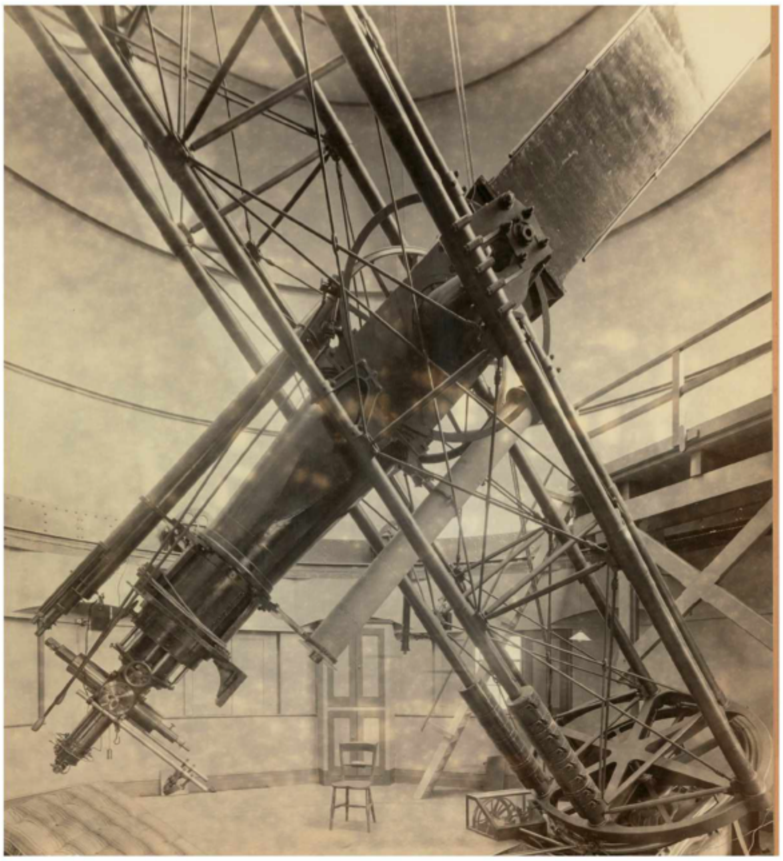
1893 THE ROYAL OBSERVATORY MAKES ITS BIGGEST STATEMENT YET

Was Greenwich under threat? The International Meridian Conference of 1884 might have confirmed the Royal Observatory's primacy in the world of astronomy. But, within a year, the eighth Astronomer Royal, William Christie, was voicing his concerns that the principal telescope at Greenwich was being overtaken by newer, better instruments at rival observatories across Europe and North America. Determined to keep Greenwich out in front of the chasing pack, Christie persuaded the Admiralty to fund a new instrument, and that 28-inch diameter lens telescope – still the largest of its type in Britain – came into use in 1893.

Most other telescopes at Greenwich were designed to be fixed into position to ensure the accurate measurement of the stars for timekeeping and navigation. The Great Equatorial Telescope – named after its mount, which kept the instrument moving parallel to the Earth's equator – was part of a new generation designed for astrophotography. With a clockwork drive that kept the instrument moving in sync with the stars from east to west, it could be used to take photos with very long exposures stretching to several hours, capturing impressive views of faint gas clouds (nebulae).

However, astronomers struggled to configure the heavy glass lens for photography, and so the telescope was reassigned to the study of double stars. By measuring the changing angle between an orbiting pair of stars, the astronomers could now calculate the mass of these distant suns.

All that came to an end in 1971 when the Great Equatorial Telescope was finally retired. However, you can still see this extraordinary instrument – housed in its distinctive onion-shaped dome – at Greenwich today.



The Great Equatorial Telescope, installed at the Royal Observatory in 1893. Fitted with a clockwork drive mount for astrophotography, it calculated the mass of distant stars

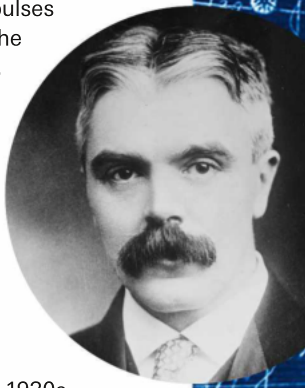
ROYAL MUSEUMS GREENWICH/GETTY IMAGES

Pip pip hooray

1924 GMT IS PIPED INTO HOMES ACROSS BRITAIN

If we want to know the time in 2025, all we have to do is check the phone in our pocket, or glance at the digital watch on our wrists. Across most of the 20th century, of course, that wasn't an option. If Britons sought an accurate time-check that they could, quite literally, set their clocks and watches by, then they had to turn on their radios and listen out for the familiar strains of the 'six pips'.

The six pips first entered the public consciousness on 5 February 1924, when the ninth Astronomer Royal, Frank Dyson (below), announced a collaboration with the BBC. The Royal Observatory would start sending electrical impulses down a telephone wire to the newly created broadcaster. These would then be converted into a series of six audio alerts – or 'pips' – that would go out on the radio on the hour, every hour.



But while some technologies were underscoring Greenwich's enduring relevance, others were undermining it. In the 1930s, scientists developed clocks based on the natural vibration of quartz crystals; then, a decade later, the first atomic timekeepers began to appear. Both offered reliability and accuracy that the system of measuring time by the stars couldn't match.

This wasn't the only threat to the Royal Observatory's pre-eminence in the 20th century. As the march of industry impacted visibility across London's skies, so Greenwich's suitability for the practice of astrophysics declined. Soon it became clear that the Observatory would have to move. And it did so twice – first to East Sussex in 1957; then to Cambridge in 1990. Eight years later, it shut altogether.

Time had finally caught up with the great old scientific institution. But its huge contribution to the fields of astronomy, timekeeping and navigation cannot be doubted – as the many thousands of people who visit the Royal Observatory museum that now occupies the famous Greenwich complex will no doubt testify. John Flamsteed would surely be proud. **H**

Dr Louise Devoy is senior curator at the Royal Observatory and author of *Royal Observatory Greenwich: A History in Objects* (October, 2025)

PODCAST

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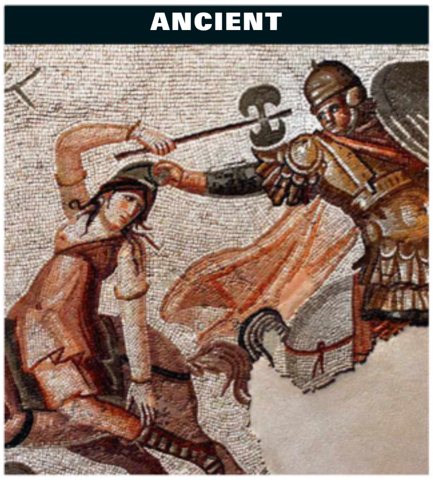
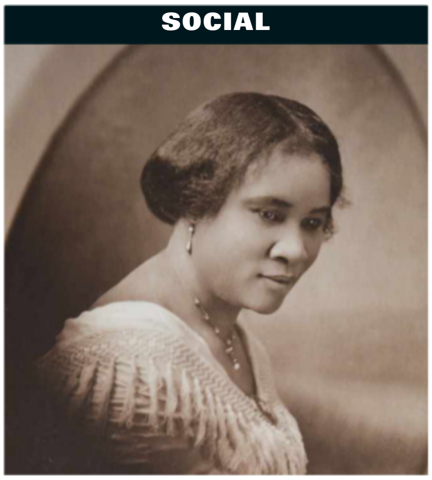
ANCIENT



Wonder women

The Amazons are remembered as formidable and fearsome female fighters who bravely battled against the male heroes of Greek legend. But, as **David Braund** reveals, there is much more to the story of these ancient warrior women.

SOCIAL



Fighting for rights

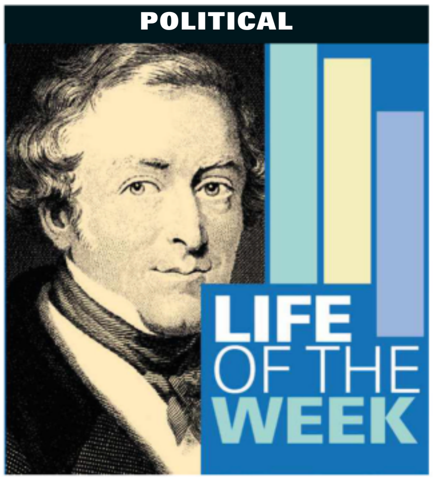
Despite facing significant obstacles in their own lives, black women in the US were at the forefront of human rights movements at home and abroad. **Keisha N Blain** shares stories of those who campaigned for freedom across the globe.

WORLD WARS

Rest in peace?

How should you treat the bodies of your enemies during wartime? **Tim Grady** discusses how Britain and Germany cared for the remains of fallen foes during and after the two world wars, and explores the impact on collective memories.

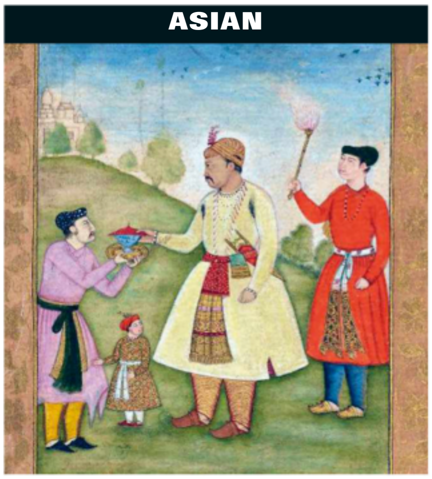
POLITICAL



Prime time

Embroiled in bitter disputes over the Corn Laws and vilified for his U-turns, Robert Peel didn't always have an easy ride during his political career and two tenures as prime minister. But, argues **Richard Gaunt**, his impact can still be felt today.

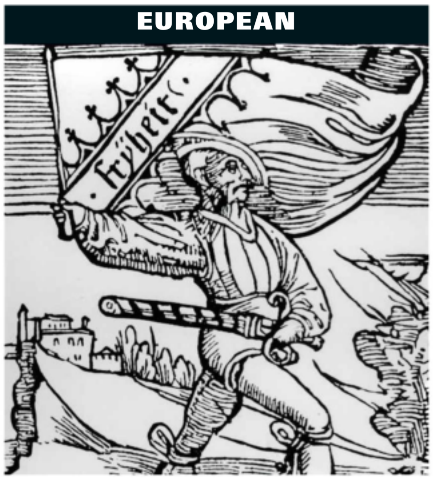
ASIAN



Imperial achievements

One of the most influential dynasties in south Asian history, the Mughals oversaw a period of dazzling architecture, innovative governance and turbulent politics. **Nandini Chatterjee** explores why they still spark debate centuries later.

EUROPEAN



Power to the people

In 1524–25, an uprising spread across Germany, with thousands of peasants fighting for a more equal society. It was a revolt that triggered a brutal backlash from the authorities, as **Lyndal Roper** reveals in this episode on the German Peasants' War.

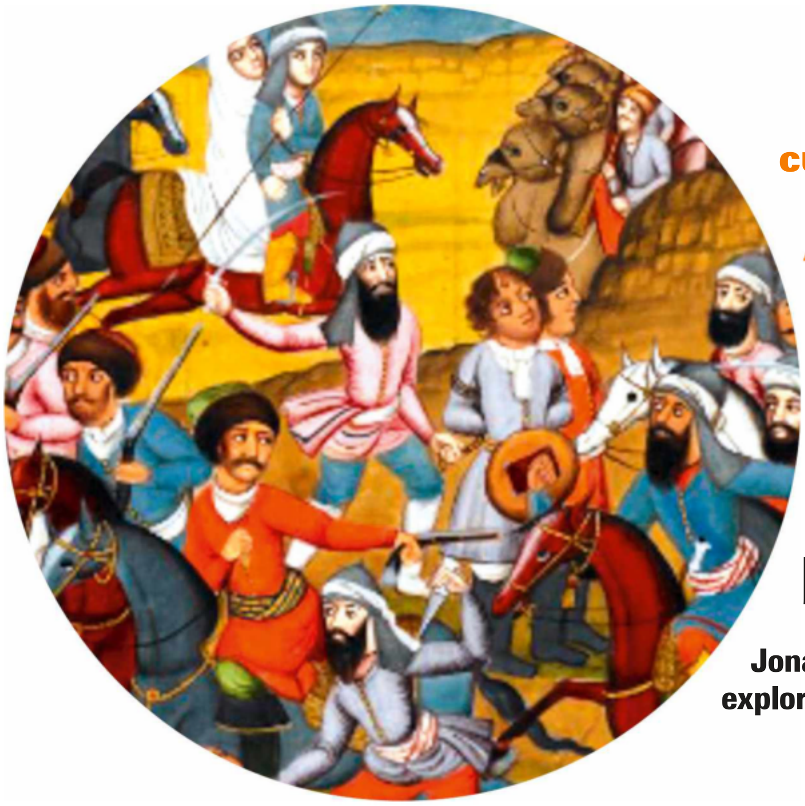
ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

BOOKS

SOCIAL

"The landed upper class have been in decline for most of the last century"

Miles Taylor reviews an absorbing study of the modern British aristocracy › page 75



CULTURAL

> ‘Slavery in Islam’ has long been a political football all too often kicked around by west-is-best nativists

Jonathan Brown is impressed by a detailed exploration of slavery in the Islamic world › page 72

CULTURE

"Every now and then, a book comes along where it's always a joy to dip in, even for just a few pages"

Lizanne Henderson lauds a new history of folklore through the ages › page 76

SCIENCE

"Einstein was among the first to argue for a boycott of German scientists"

Jimena Canales considers an "engaging but flawed" portrait of an iconic scientist › page 73

INTERVIEW

Sudhir Hazareesingh on how enslaved people organised their own resistance to oppression

› page 68

GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY

“Africa exerted a profound influence on cultures of resistance to slavery, yet its role is often overlooked”

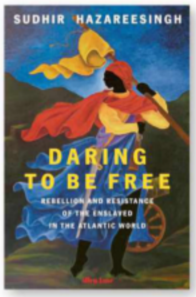
SUDHIR HAZAREESINGH speaks to Danny Bird about how enslaved people, who needed no lessons in freedom from white abolitionists, organised themselves to fight their oppressors

Danny Bird **Your book opens with the story of a woman named Solitude on Guadaloupe. Why did you choose to start with her and what can she tell us about the wider history of resistance among enslaved people?**

Sudhir Hazareesingh Solitude was the first black woman to be commemorated with a statue in Paris – an honour granted only recently [the statue was unveiled in 2022]. I chose her because her vital role in the anti-slavery struggle, both in Guadeloupe and more widely, had largely been ignored. She represents the countless anonymous heroes of ongoing resistance to slavery.

Little is known of her life. Born in Guadeloupe in the late 18th century, her mother had been raped during the Middle Passage. Solitude gained her freedom in 1794 when France abolished slavery in its colonies and lived among other newly emancipated people for about a decade.

In the early 19th century, Napoleon Bonaparte sent forces to reinstate slavery in Guadeloupe. Solitude resisted, took up arms, was captured and executed. Pregnant at the time, she gave birth and was put to death the following day. Her story is tragic yet heroic. She was forgotten for much of the 19th and 20th centuries. Her legacy, and that of thousands of others who resisted enslavement, was recovered only in the late 20th century by historians seeking to honour these unsung fighters.


SUDHIR HAZAREESINGH
DARING TO BE FREE
REBELLION AND RESISTANCE OF THE ENSLAVED IN THE ATLANTIC WORLD
Allen Lane

Daring to Be Free: Rebellion and Resistance of the Enslaved in the Atlantic World
by Sudhir Hazareesingh
(Allen Lane, 464 pages, £30)

You have written that resistance was integral to the practice of Atlantic slavery. How did you go about researching these acts of resistance given how often they’ve been erased from the archive?

Researching this subject proved challenging because the archive of slavery is highly uneven. Most surviving documents – around 95 per cent – were produced by enslavers, leaving very few records by the enslaved themselves. In many cases, even their names are lost, which is why so little is known about individuals such as Solitude. Enslaved people were largely treated as property, appearing in records only when they rebelled or left some trace behind through their owners’ records.

Other sources, however, allow their voices to emerge. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, some formerly enslaved people gave interviews or wrote memoirs describing their experiences and acts of resistance. Oral history is also crucial. Although most enslaved people were illiterate, their cultural memory was passed down through generations and survives in contemporary Africa.

In the book you are very careful about terminology when it comes to this subject. You use ‘enslaved person’ rather than ‘slave’ and you avoid terms like ‘slave owner’. Why do you think the language that we use about slavery matters so much, and how has it shifted over time?

I think it’s an important question, and I appreciate the opportunity to address it. The language of slavery has always been political, because enslavement itself was a political act: one group of people stripping another of freedom and erasing their humanity. The terms used by enslavers to describe those they oppressed were invariably derogatory.

One of the problems with the word ‘slave’ is that it can suggest an occupation or role, like being a carpenter or mason, when in fact slavery was never chosen. It was forced. This is why ‘enslaved person’ is more accurate – it reflects the imposed nature of the condition.

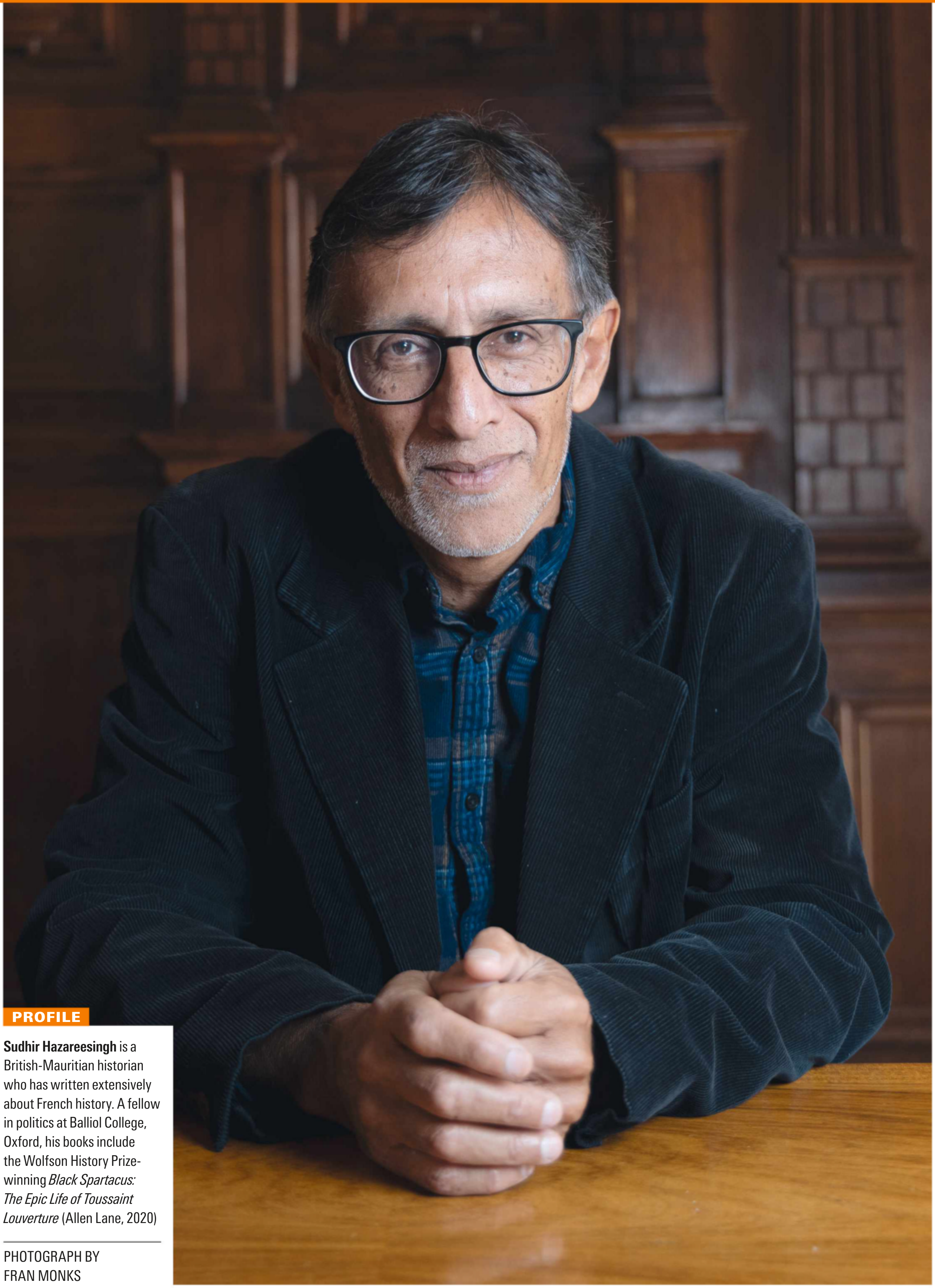
We see the same issue with terms such as ‘fugitive’. Enslaved people who escaped were labelled ‘fugitives’, marking them as criminals for breaking the law, yet the real problem was that the law itself was unjust, designed to legitimise slavery.

This is why we need to be mindful of language. The terminology served political purposes: to justify and to normalise enslavement. In the 21st century, we must avoid anything which suggests that. Still, historical accuracy is also essential. Some terms, like ‘slave driver’ or ‘slave ship’, convey the coercive and oppressive nature of slavery and are therefore worth retaining because the terms describe roles or institutions with clarity.

In my work, I try to strike a balance between remaining historically accurate and avoiding language that perpetuates the dehumanisation of enslaved people.

You begin your book in Africa, tracing what you call the “foundations of resistance”. How do you think African cultural, spiritual and martial traditions shaped the determination of the enslaved to resist once they crossed the Atlantic?

Africa exerted a profound influence on the cultures of resistance to slavery, yet its role is often overlooked in the literature. Histories of



PROFILE

Sudhir Hazareesingh is a British-Mauritian historian who has written extensively about French history. A fellow in politics at Balliol College, Oxford, his books include the Wolfson History Prize-winning *Black Spartacus: The Epic Life of Toussaint Louverture* (Allen Lane, 2020)

PHOTOGRAPH BY
FRAN MONKS

enslaved people frequently ignore their African upbringing and experiences, which shaped their later political and cultural identities.

In the opening chapter of my book, I explore the resistance of people captured by west African slave raiders. They fought back, formed village militias, escaped from coastal holding sites and in some cases established long-lasting runaway communities within Africa itself.

Two key sources of resistance trace back to Africa. First, religious and spiritual traditions were central. African societies practised diverse religions: Catholicism, Islam and traditional African faiths, many of which inspired forms of dissent. Traditional African religions, in particular, provided spiritual resources that sustained opposition. One notable example is the west African religion of Vodun that travelled to Haiti, forming the spiritual foundation of the revolutionaries who overthrew slavery in the late 18th century.

Second, military experience played a critical role. Many enslaved Africans had prior experience in resisting capture or fighting in intra-African wars. They brought martial skills to the Americas and Caribbean, later mobilising them in struggles against slavery.

The Haitian Revolution, which you mentioned there, looms large in your book. Beyond its military success, what do you see as the lasting intellectual and political legacy of the revolution for the Atlantic world?

I had an intuition that the Haitian Revolution was significant, but I did not realise quite how important it was. I touched on it briefly in my previous book, *Black Spartacus*, a biography of the central hero of the Haitian Revolution, Toussaint Louverture. In this book, however, I wanted to explore how its success shaped the wider world.

Having fought for independence since 1791, in 1804 the Haitians won, creating the world's first black independent post-colonial state, born out of slavery. From its inception, Haiti stood as a beacon for enslaved peoples across the Atlantic world, inspiring their own struggles for freedom, independence and justice.

Its influence spread throughout the Caribbean and the Americas from the early 1790s onwards, carried by travellers, refugees and, above all, sailors. Sailors played a crucial role in disseminating stories and heroic myths of the revolution, boosting the confidence of enslaved communities and nurturing their aspirations for liberty and self-determination.

It is important to note that enslaved people were not simply trying to replicate Haiti. They did not share a single political vision. Their ideas of freedom and governance varied greatly. What Haiti provided was not a fixed blueprint but a powerful source of inspiration, shaping the major revolts of enslaved peoples and influencing the wider fight for emancipation in the British and French colonies.

> **"Culture lay at the heart of rebellion across the Atlantic. It was not opposed to Enlightenment or European revolutionary ideas. Rather, both could work together"**

BICENTENAIRE DE L'INDEPE
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On the money In 2004, as Haiti celebrated its bicentenary, the revolutionary and soldier Sanité Bélair was honoured by being featured on a 10-gourd banknote

The revolution's legacy reached as far as the American struggle against slavery, culminating in emancipation in 1865. Leading African-American campaigners such as Frederick Douglass were deeply influenced by Haiti. Douglass was fascinated by Toussaint Louverture, frequently celebrating him in his speeches. Haiti, therefore, gave extraordinary impetus to the global struggle for freedom and self-determination.

Women also feature prominently in your account – from priestesses in Africa to fighters such as Sanité Bélair in Haiti. How did women shape these struggles?

I wanted to highlight this theme because archives frequently show women playing prominent roles in slave revolts, often noted in military and police reports.

This traces back to Africa, where militias defending against slave raiders included both men and women, establishing a tradition of female participation in combat. Yet women's roles were not limited to fighting, they were crucial in intelligence gathering. Organising escapes or uprisings required careful planning: collecting information, understanding the aims of the enslaved and assessing the resources of their oppressors.

Women were often strategically positioned for this work, many employed in or near plantation houses, granting them access to vital information that could facilitate revolts. Research on US plantations shows that major uprisings, such as Nat Turner's in Virginia in 1831, relied on extensive networks maintained over months or years, with women playing indispensable roles.

This underscores a broader point: solidarity defined slave resistance. Enslavers sought to destroy the humanity of the enslaved and prevent bonds of trust. Yet history shows the opposite: enslaved people forged networks of solidarity, which became the foundation for resistance and, at times, for striking back at their oppressors.

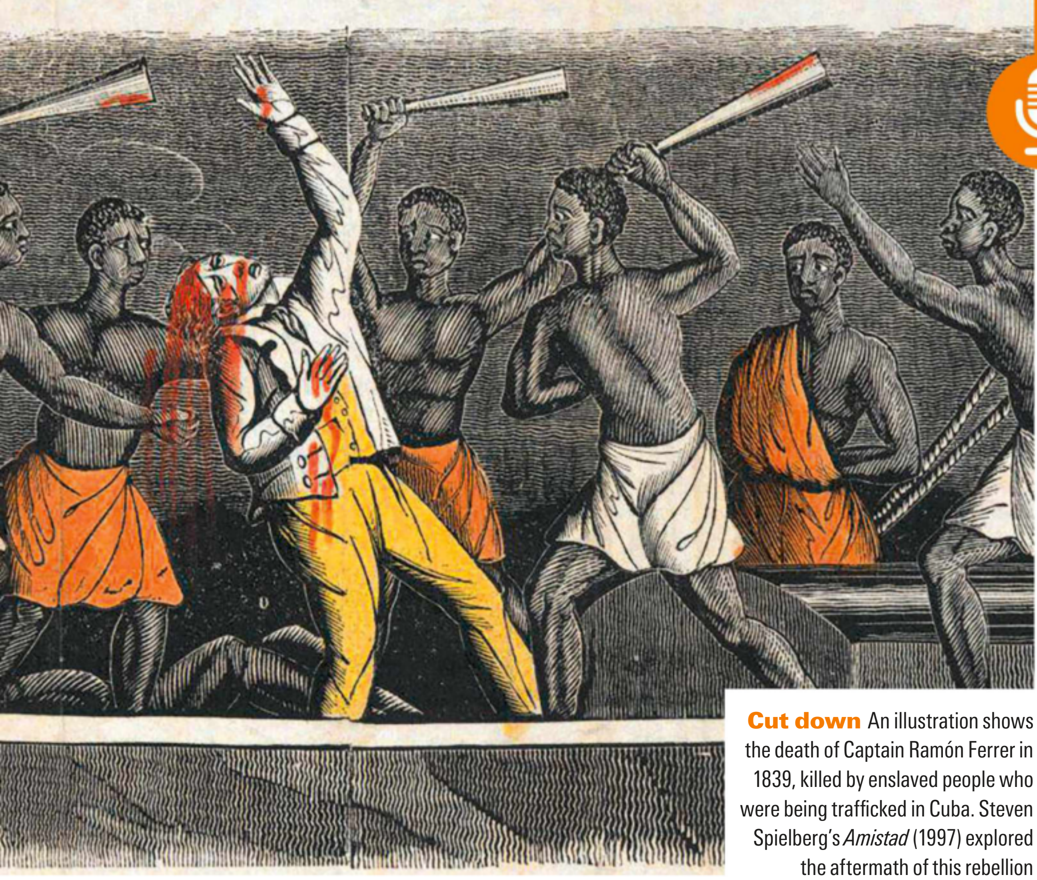
You show how resistance took many forms – from sabotage and escape to song, ritual and storytelling. Which examples most surprised you in showing how culture became a weapon of survival and defiance?

That's a very good question. What I found in the literature was a tendency to associate culture with conservatism, the idea being that people would only revolt if 'enlightened' or western ideas were brought to them. For a long time, the story of the Haitian Revolution was told in these terms: the enslaved were oppressed but, until the ideas of the French Revolution reached them, they could not seize the moment and fight back against their oppressors.

Implicit in that view is the notion that their own culture – religion, spirituality and traditions – was not conducive to revolt.

ALAMY

Struggle and solidarity Listen to our interview with Sudhir Hazareesingh at *historyextra.com/daring-pod*



Cut down An illustration shows the death of Captain Ramón Ferrer in 1839, killed by enslaved people who were being trafficked in Cuba. Steven Spielberg's *Amistad* (1997) explored the aftermath of this rebellion

ALAMY

Yet the evidence strongly disproves this. People were determined to preserve their languages, cultural identities, facial markings and skills acquired in Africa – whether trades, religious knowledge or medicinal practices. These were not only vital to their own lives but were also deployed in movements of resistance.

Culture, therefore, played a crucial role in enabling opposition to slavery. Very often, slavers believed that allowing cultural rituals posed no threat, seeing them merely as harmless activities. But again and again, including in Saint-Domingue [the French colony that later became Haiti] in 1791, gatherings that appeared to be cultural celebrations were in fact used to plan revolutionary activities.

So culture lay at the heart of rebellion across the Atlantic. It was not opposed to Enlightenment or European revolutionary ideas. Rather, both could work together: sometimes people drew on one, sometimes on the other and sometimes they combined the two. That interplay was one of the most striking findings in my research.

One of your core arguments is that enslaved people, not white reformers, were the true abolitionists. How does centring their voices change our understanding of slavery's end, and what does it reveal about white abolitionists' attitudes?

It is not my intention to disparage white abolitionists, who were honourable people engaged in a very difficult struggle. Slavery was deeply entrenched. In Britain, for example, it was supported by parliament, the monarchy, the press and powerful economic interests. Confronting such an institution was extremely challenging.

Many abolitionists pursued gradual strategies, such as ending the slave trade, which Britain achieved in 1807. Afterward, they largely assumed slavery would eventually die out, without committing to a timetable. The call for immediate abolition was instead championed by more radical activists, including women such as Elizabeth Heyrick, who challenged their leaders' timidity and demanded action.

Thus there was an internal debate among British, American and French abolitionists. Yet the greatest force for change came from the enslaved themselves, who understood that freedom could not wait. The Haitian Revolution demonstrated black leadership and self-governance, inspiring demands for immediate emancipation. Revolts in Barbados (1816), Demerara (1823), and Jamaica (1831–32) were pivotal in shaping British abolition in the early 1830s.

Today, the term 'abolitionists' often refers to those who supported abolition in principle but did not work for immediate change. The true abolitionists, the enslaved themselves, fought for freedom directly, frequently at great personal risk. Their resistance, rather than the lobbying of figures such as William Wilberforce, ultimately drove the end of slavery.

The book spans almost four centuries, from the early Atlantic trade to 19th-century Brazil and Cuba. How did resistance evolve during this period and what continuities persisted throughout?

What struck me most was how immediate resistance was. As early as 1503, a Spanish governor in Hispaniola reported enslaved people refusing their condition and fleeing. Throughout the early 1500s, escapes and rebellions were frequent, and many enslaved people allied with persecuted Native Americans, showing resistance was widespread across the Atlantic world.

Two factors drove this: extreme brutality by enslavers, which left no incentive to comply, and a natural desire for freedom. Early revolts, sometimes linked to African cultural practices, and later ones inspired by revolutionary ideas, all shared the same goal: autonomy. Enslaved people did not need European or American revolutions to understand freedom.

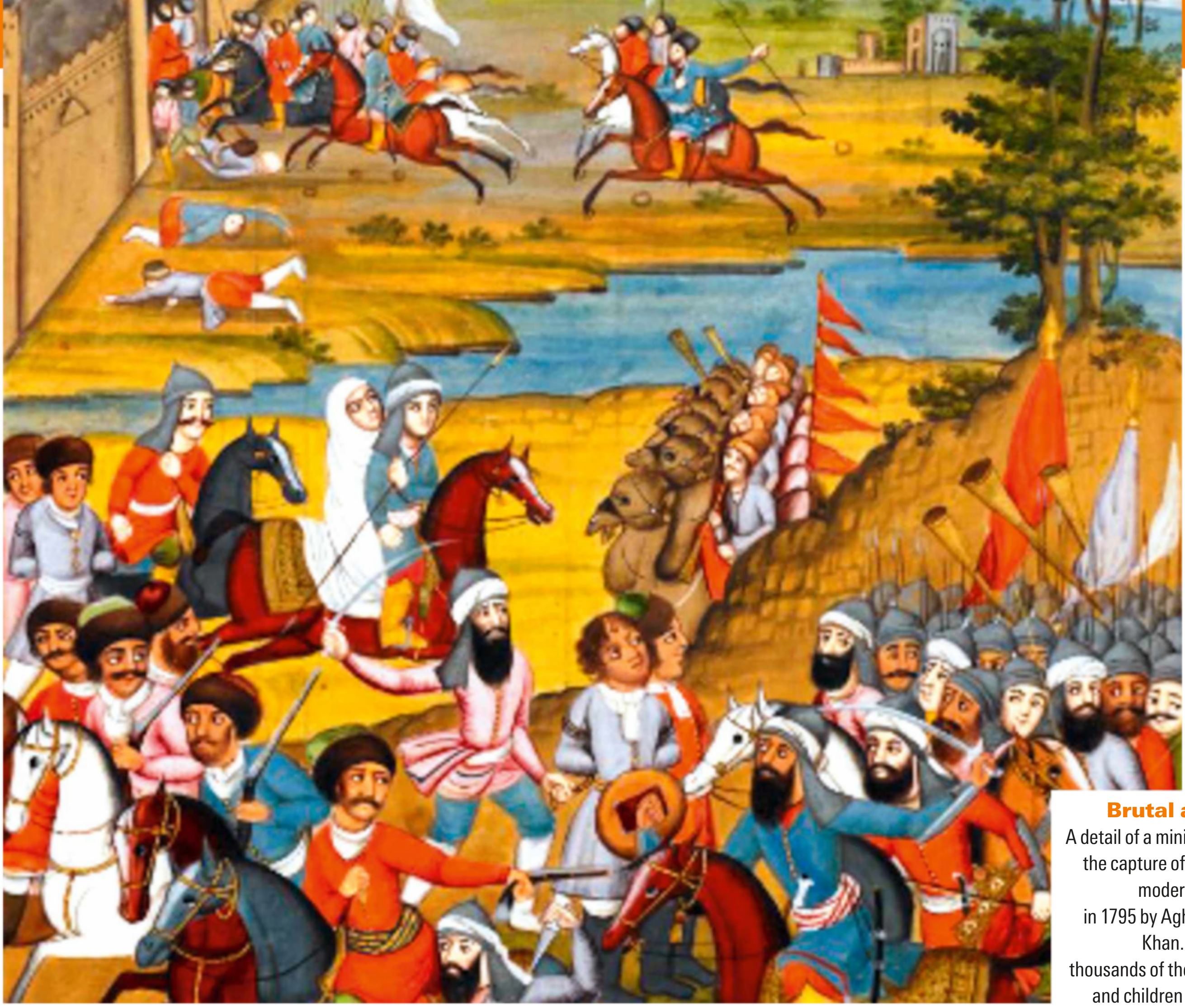
Autonomy encompassed collective self-determination – governing themselves, shaping communities and making decisions. It appeared in diverse forms: cultural retentions, runaway settlements, semi-autonomous territories and independent states such as Haiti. Each group imagined freedom differently, devising varied solutions and actively asserting their agency.

Finally, you write of "honouring our debts" in your book's conclusion. What debts do you think we owe today to those who resisted slavery?

This book seeks to reconstruct a past we have forgotten and erased, while also examining the principles and values we want to uphold today. Its importance lies first in acknowledging the legacy of slavery, which had profound and lasting consequences for the communities it affected. These impacts: economic, social and health-related, such as the prevalence of type 2 diabetes in former slave colonies including Mauritius, where I was born, are still felt today.

Everyone should know this history. Integrating it into the national curriculum is crucial, as is how we commemorate and memorialise the past. Britain has many national heroes, but figures such as Sam Sharpe, the Jamaican rebel leader of the 1830s who fought for the right of enslaved people to determine their own futures, should also be celebrated. Those who fought for freedom are part of our democratic story and deserve recognition.

Reparations are a complex issue that should begin with a conversation between governments, starting with an acknowledgment of past wrongs. Yet concrete action matters more than apologies. Institutions such as *The Guardian*, the University of Glasgow, Lloyd's of London and the Church of England have pledged millions for reparatory purposes. If the British government followed their lead, significant progress could be made.



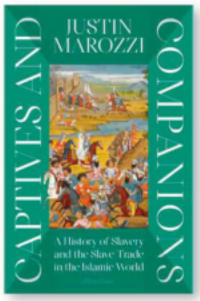
Brutal aftermath
A detail of a miniature showing the capture of Tiflis (Tbilisi in modern-day Georgia) in 1795 by Agha Mohammad Khan. Subsequently, thousands of the city's women and children were enslaved

ALAMY

SLAVERY

Of human bondage

JONATHAN BROWN welcomes an exploration of slavery within the Islamic world that's impressively detailed and explores the nuances of a politically charged subject


JUSTIN MAROZZI
CAPTIVES AND COMPANIONS
A History of Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Islamic World

Captives and Companions: A History of Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Islamic World
by Justin Marozzi
Allen Lane, 560 pages, £35

Historian and travel writer Justin Marozzi's journey through slavery in the Mediterranean and African worlds of Islam is as comprehensive as it is engaging – and irresistibly immediate because of the way the author employs fine-grain detail. It helps too that, as the reader encounters slavery in the Prophet Muhammad's world of seventh-century Arabia, Marozzi has quite a tale to tell, beginning with an exploration of how Ethiopian, Persian and Arab slaves – men and women – were some of Islam's earliest and most influential converts.

As Muslims expanded into the Persian and Roman worlds, slaves taken and then freed in those conquests formed the backbone of Islam's early scholarly and literary world. An incredible chapter on the Zanj rebellion, a ninth-century revolt by African slaves in southern Iraq, recounts how they upended the existing order, with black former slaves taking noble Arab women as their slave concubines.

We also encounter the world of Baghdad's elite slave-courtesans. These women combined a mastery of music, language and seduction. Arib (c797–c890), who wrote more than a thousand songs, "captured the hearts, and exercised the libidos, of no fewer than eight caliphs over at least seven decades".

Marozzi guides us through a phenomenon unique to Islamic civilisation: slave soldiers (think the Unsullied in *Game of Thrones*), many of whom seized power themselves. One Abbasid caliph was given an enema of boiling water by his former praetorian. Another was "kicked in the testicles" until he died. This theme of topsy-turviness continues in the Ottoman empire, which was for centuries administered by elite slaves. As late as the 19th century, a grand vizier, Edhem Pasha (1818-93), had been enslaved as a child.

Chapters on the early modern "cosmopolitan free-for-all" of raiding and slaving by

> “As with Italian-born Kiliç Ali Paşa, some of the most infamous Muslim pirates were Europeans”

Mediterranean pirates are compelling. Marozzi shows how stories emphasising the horrors of Muslim slavery foreshadowed the Islamophobia and culture wars of today. Narratives, true and false, of people captured and enslaved by swarthy Moors became a massive culture industry in western Europe from the 17th century. But European pirates and navies enslaved just as many Muslims. What’s more, as with Italian-born ex-galley slave Kiliç Ali Paşa (c1519–87), some of the most infamous Muslim pirates were Europeans.

Marozzi’s description of the Saharan and east African slave trades is shocking. The late 1800s was not, as often depicted, a denouement of slavery in Islamic civilisation but its gruesome peak. From slave caravans crossing the Sahara to enslaved pearl divers in the Persian Gulf, its excesses, including the rampant and prohibited enslavement of Muslims, triggered Muslim activists to turn against slavery.

Theoretical discussions and questions of framing often interest few beyond scholars, but on the topic of slavery such discourse is hugely important. If someone who is among the richest and most powerful people in a society is technically a slave after his aristocratic family willingly offered him up as such (as was the case with many grand viziers in the Ottoman empire), what are we to make of his status? And how does any answer change how we view slavery in the Islamic world?

That said, this book, perhaps to its detriment, bypasses the question of how to define slavery in world history or within Islamic civilisation. More positively, describing a world of breathtaking diversity and complexity, Marozzi shows the reader how ‘slavery in Islam’ has long been a political football, one all too often kicked around by west-is-best nativists. He explains that anti-Islamic ‘moral’ cheerleading is almost always inaccurate, and, what’s worse, it detracts from the one, undeniable reality this book so vividly describes: enormous human suffering. H

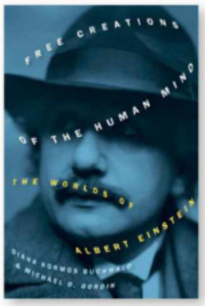
Jonathan Brown is Alwaleed bin Talal chair of Islamic civilisation at Georgetown University

GETT IMAGES

SCIENCE

The physicist as hero

JIMENA CANALES argues that a new study of Einstein misses some of the complexity in his story


FREE CREATIONS OF THE HUMAN MIND
THE WORLDS OF ALBERT EINSTEIN
DIANA KORMOS BUCHWALD & MICHAEL D. GORDIN

Free Creations of the Human Mind: The Worlds of Albert Einstein
by Diana Kormos Buchwald and Michael D Gordin
OUP, 152 pages, £14.99

While Einstein scholarship has recently been energised by revelations about the physicist’s private life, this engaging but flawed book tells a more familiar story, of his scientific triumphs and dedication to the betterment of humankind.

It makes much of how, at the end of the First World War, a 40-year-old “self-effacing” Einstein was thrust into celebrity. He used his platform “to bring about a stable, peaceful coexistence, and tolerance among former enemies”. As the Entente nations boycotted German science, he strove for “international cooperation”. Although many of his contemporaries embraced communism, Einstein held an “abiding suspicion of the Bolshevik regime”. As antisemitism flourished, he defended the Jewish community with a consistency “no less variable over time than his scientific and political views”.

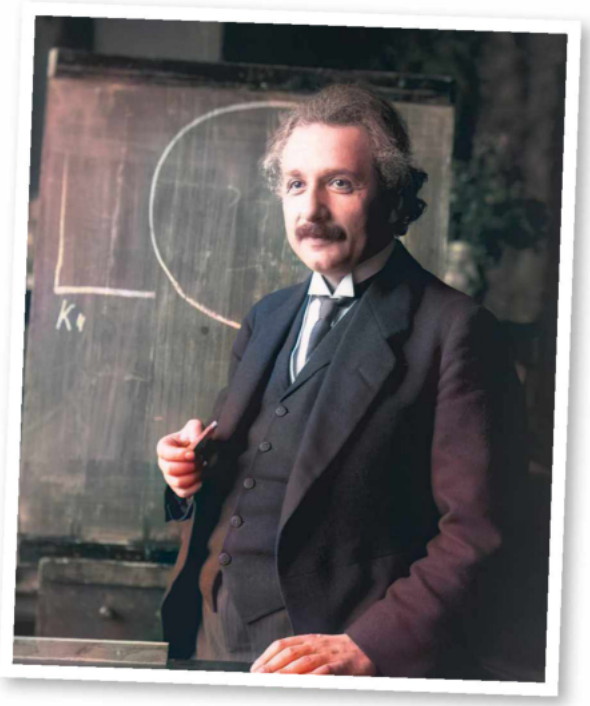
But the authors ignore contrary evidence from his private correspondence. Einstein was, in fact, among the first to argue for a boycott of German scientists. He was initially seduced by communism. And while Einstein “championed the newly formed League of Nations”, he later withdrew his support.

There are other contradictions. Although he joined pacifist organisations during the Great War, Einstein’s denunciations of its horrors were accompanied by a desire to see Britain victorious. He wanted Germany’s war guilt publicised and thought the Versailles Treaty “turned out to be fairly lenient”. As Germany secretly rearmed in the Weimar era, he advocated a pre-emptive war. And did he really “never waver in his view of the justness of the enterprise of building up the Jewish community in Palestine”? Only if one considers the project without “the idea of a state with borders” and if it excludes those Zionist nationalists he found “closely akin” to “the Nazi and Fascist parties”.

These caveats, along with changes in his views on the velocity and bending of light, the ether and gravitational waves, are absent from the uplifting story of success that has posthumously followed him – and which this book too often repeats.

But why be so coy? He may have received only one Nobel Prize yet, as the authors state, no fewer than seven others “stem directly from Einstein’s work in 1905 and 1915”. In light of his successes, neither his flaws nor any debts his work owes to others need hiding – our reverence will survive a truthful portrayal. H

Jimena Canales is a science historian. Her books include *Bedeviled: A Shadow History of Demons in Science* (Princeton University Press, 2020)



Albert Einstein, photographed in 1921, combined his acclaimed scientific research with political and campaigning activities

PODCAST

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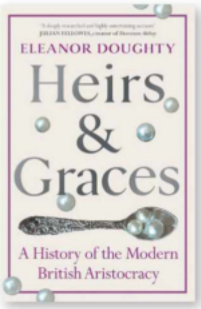
SOCIAL

Different class

MILES TAYLOR is absorbed by a study of how Britain's hereditary peers have negotiated changing times



Heirs and Graces: A History of the Modern British Aristocracy
by Eleanor Doughty
Hutchinson Heinemann,
656 pages, £30

Does the Labour government's plan to abolish the remaining hereditary peers in the House of Lords spell the end of the British aristocracy? Not really. As Eleanor Doughty's absorbing and compendious book shows, the landed upper class have been in decline for most of the last century, but have managed a "slow metamorphosis" to soften their fall.

This is a fairly well-known story. Readers familiar with the classic work of David Cannadine and Peter Mandler will recognise many of the themes. But *Heirs and Graces* is one of the few studies to focus exclusively on the c800 men (relatively few are women) who are hereditary peers, as opposed to peers created for life.

In 1945, their condition looked parlous. The book opens with a vivid account of Wentworth Woodhouse near Rotherham in South Yorkshire, where Peter Wentworth-Fitzwilliam, the eighth earl, had his estate literally ripped from under his feet, as Manny Shinwell, minister for fuel and power, requisitioned the black gold of the family's coal mines for the nation. Other stately homes fell into disuse, a rot that had begun with the agricultural depression of the late 19th century and successive hikes in taxation. Sometimes wounds were self-inflicted.

Doughty documents infidelity, gambling, and drug and alcohol abuse as inheritances were frittered away. Bad political choices didn't help: flirting with fascism and converting to communism. In other cases, civil conflict caught up with the privileged elite. Northern Irish families became targets during the Troubles. Across the 20th century, the political clout of the hereditaries waned too, as Liberal and Labour governments reduced the role of the House of Lords.

Lifelines were available. As in earlier years, marrying into American wealth bailed out some families. The National Trust, where historian and country house aficionado James Lees-Milne played a key role, gave assistance here and there. But mostly, the old aristocracy adapted to survive. Estates looked to leisure and tourism for income. Longleat became a safari park, Goodwood a motor-racing circuit, Alton Towers a theme park. Others welcomed in film crews.

These novelties aside, the majority of landed magnates simply turned to managing diminished estates. Apart from a few notable scandals – the Wildeblood trial of 1954 and the Argyll divorce of 1963 – they disappeared from sight. One of the strengths of *Heirs and Graces* lies in bringing the intimate lives of the landed elite back into view.

Doughty concludes that the hereditary aristocracy remain a class apart. Several of them, especially the London landowners, are billionaires. Despite primogeniture (the convention that women cannot inherit titles), dynasties survive via inter-marriage.

Not that aristocratic families seem especially happy. Aristocrats are twice as likely to get divorced as the average Briton, although in some cases a second marriage has secured the succession of the title.

Heirs and Graces passes over their inconvenient origins: wealth rooted in feudalism, land grabs at home and abroad, and the slave trade. Like Evelyn Waugh, whose works supply her chapter titles, Doughty sentimentalises her subjects. Another of Waugh's books, *Robbery Under Law* (1939), might have offered a different perspective.

Miles Taylor lectures in British history at the Humboldt University of Berlin

Aristocrats such as Peter Wentworth-Fitzwilliam, pictured with wife, Olive, faced postwar financial issues

GETTY IMAGES

THE CLASSIC BOOK

Breeze Barrington on an inspiring **account of a turbulent and transformative era**

MARK KISHLANSKY
A MONARCHY TRANSFORMED
BRITAIN 1603–1714

A Monarchy Transformed: Britain 1603–1714
by Mark Kishlansky
(Penguin, 1996)

As an undergraduate student, I asked one of my tutors where I could learn more about the 17th century. The answer: read Kishlansky. I picked up a copy of *A Monarchy Transformed* and was immediately enthralled. Narrative history at its best, it plunged me into the turmoil and upheavals of this whirlwind of a century that Kishlansky describes as "a wheel of transformation in perpetual motion".

The book reveals the 17th century to be the foundation of modern Britain. England, Scotland and Ireland went from being three nations to a united kingdom, no longer a culturally and politically isolated set of islands but an intellectual and military power. It went through near-absolutist monarchy and an experiment in republicanism before arriving at constitutional monarchy. Power devolved from the court to parliament and from the aristocracy to the rising merchant class. A new system of finance-driven capitalism, crucial to funding the expansion of the British empire, began to emerge.

It was an era of conspiracies, rebellions, revolutions, hedonism and Puritanism. It brought us Shakespeare's late work, Johns Donne, Milton, and Dryden – and Aphra Behn. Opera came from Italy, ballet from France. Print culture took hold, huge medical and scientific advancements led to the foundation of the Royal Society. People began drinking tea, coffee and champagne.

Kishlansky's aim in writing the book was to recreate his own "fascination" with the century "for another generation". It certainly did that for me and, almost 30 years after its initial publication, it's as inspiring and exciting a read as ever.

Breeze Barrington is author of *The Graces: The Extraordinary Untold Lives of Women at the Restoration Court* (Bloomsbury, 2025)

FROM FACT TO FICTION

Buried secrets

Catherine Merridale discusses her atmospheric murder mystery, *Moscow Underground*

Which real events or figures shaped your portrayal of the Moscow Metro's construction in the early 1930s?
I built my story around the real Metro and I portrayed many of its real characters, including Nikita Khrushchev. I was fascinated to learn that archaeologists had been sent to clear the way for the tunnellers. So some of the discoveries in my story really happened, including the finding of Ivan's the Terrible's lost palace.

Are investigator Anton Belkin or Vika of the secret police inspired by actual people in Soviet history?
They are entirely imaginary. But at the same time, I have 30 years' experience of interviewing survivors of Stalin's tyranny. The voices of those real people – their choice of words, their preoccupations, even their tastes in tea and music – echoed in my imagination.

How did your research on Moscow's Communist Party influence this novel?
My background in political history allows me to feel like a native of the period. I understand the dreams, the pressures, the gathering fear and also, thankfully, the jokes. But my characters have to live in their present. They do not know what history will do with the rest of their lives.

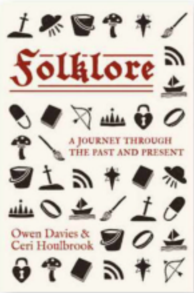
What does going underground reveal about how Stalin's regime shaped memory and history?
Above ground, Stalin's planners changed Moscow utterly: removing churches, widening roads, imposing their new logic and proclaiming their ideas. But underneath the capital, the deep imprints of many different pasts survived, as did the bones of the murdered and the starved. In Stalin's lifetime they stayed buried – and the Metro, with its gaudy stations, was a dazzling distraction – but Moscow's history is still all there, even if most of it is once again a state secret.

Moscow Underground
by Catherine Merridale
Fontana, 336 pages, £16.99

CULTURE

The stories we tell

LIZANNE HENDERSON enjoys a new history of folklore through the ages that explores some lesser-known avenues


Folklore
A JOURNEY THROUGH THE PAST AND PRESENT
Owen Davies & Ceri Houlbrook

Folklore: A Journey Through the Past and Present
by Owen Davies and Ceri Houlbrook
Manchester University Press, 336 pages, £20

Every now and then, a book comes along where it's always a joy to dip in, even if just for a few pages. *Folklore* fits that description. The title's sub-heading, *A Journey Through the Past and Present*, is a fitting prelude to what lies within, with the bulk of the material covering the 18th and 19th centuries but continuing up to the present day. *Folklore* thus offers its readers a blend of what might be considered traditional folkloric material with more modern-day popular culture. This structure pays dividends in terms of effectively presenting the developmental phases and evolutionary processes of folklore.

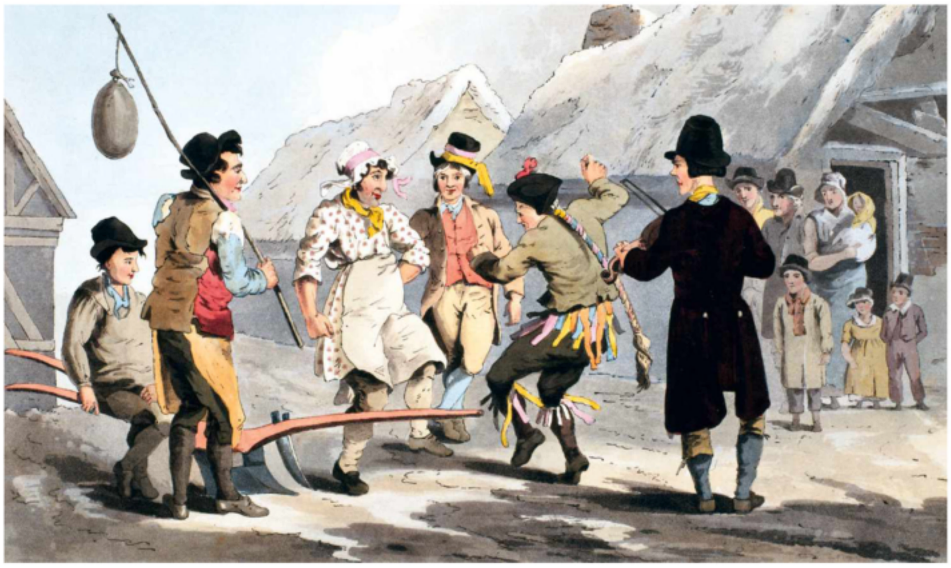
The book consists of (an auspiciously numbered) 13 chapters, divided into seven main parts, a structure that assists the reader in navigating the wide range of topics covered. Additionally, the meaty introduction provides helpful background context to the field of folklore, its origins and how it manifests in the heritage museum world. Representation is given to familiar subject areas within the field such as calendar customs, ritual, performance, folk narratives and supernatural beliefs, but also topics that are less often highlighted, such as broadcasting, media studies and digital folklore.

The chapter on folklore of the natural world is a particular favourite for this reader, with excellent coverage on folkloric associations with non-human animals, although it is perhaps weaker on plant life.

The final chapter, dealing with British colonialism and expressions of national identities is, arguably, the most thought-provoking and potentially controversial. For instance, the contention that "there is little confusion" between Britishness and Englishness these days is certainly not something with which everyone in the four nations would concur. The book might also be reproached for having an Anglocentric slant, a perennial problem in studies claiming to represent 'British' culture.

Overall, *Folkore* is meticulously researched and demonstrates academic rigour, yet is written in a lively and accessible style. H

Lizanne Henderson is senior lecturer in history at the University of Glasgow



A song and dance An engraving from the early 19th century shows Plough Monday, when a plough was hauled from house to house to mark the resumption of work after the Christmas period

FRANK PAYNE/GETTY IMAGES

COMING SOON

HISTORY EXTRA ACADEMY

TUDOR LIFE

with Ruth Goodman

Explore our new HistoryExtra Academy series, free to watch if you are a *BBC History Magazine* subscriber

This seven-episode course, filmed on location in Plas Mawr, Conwy, explores what life was like for ordinary Tudor people – from the clothes they wore, to the food they ate – guided by historian Ruth Goodman.

About the expert

Ruth Goodman is a historian of the social and domestic life of Britain. She has advised the Royal Shakespeare Company's Globe Theatre and presented a number of BBC television series, including *Tudor Monastery Farm*. She is also the author of several books, including *How to Be a Tudor: A Dawn-to-Dusk Guide to Everyday Life* (Viking, 2015).

Episode one | Leisure

Episode two | Religion

Episode three | Work

Episode four | Childhood

Episode five | Food and drink

Episode six | Fashion

Episode seven | Love, sex and marriage

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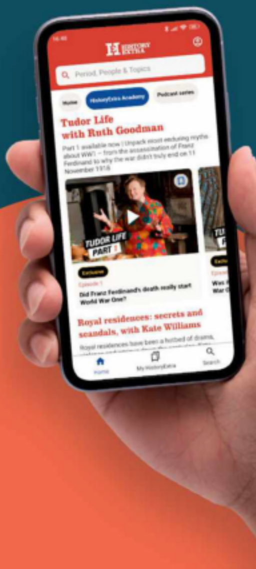
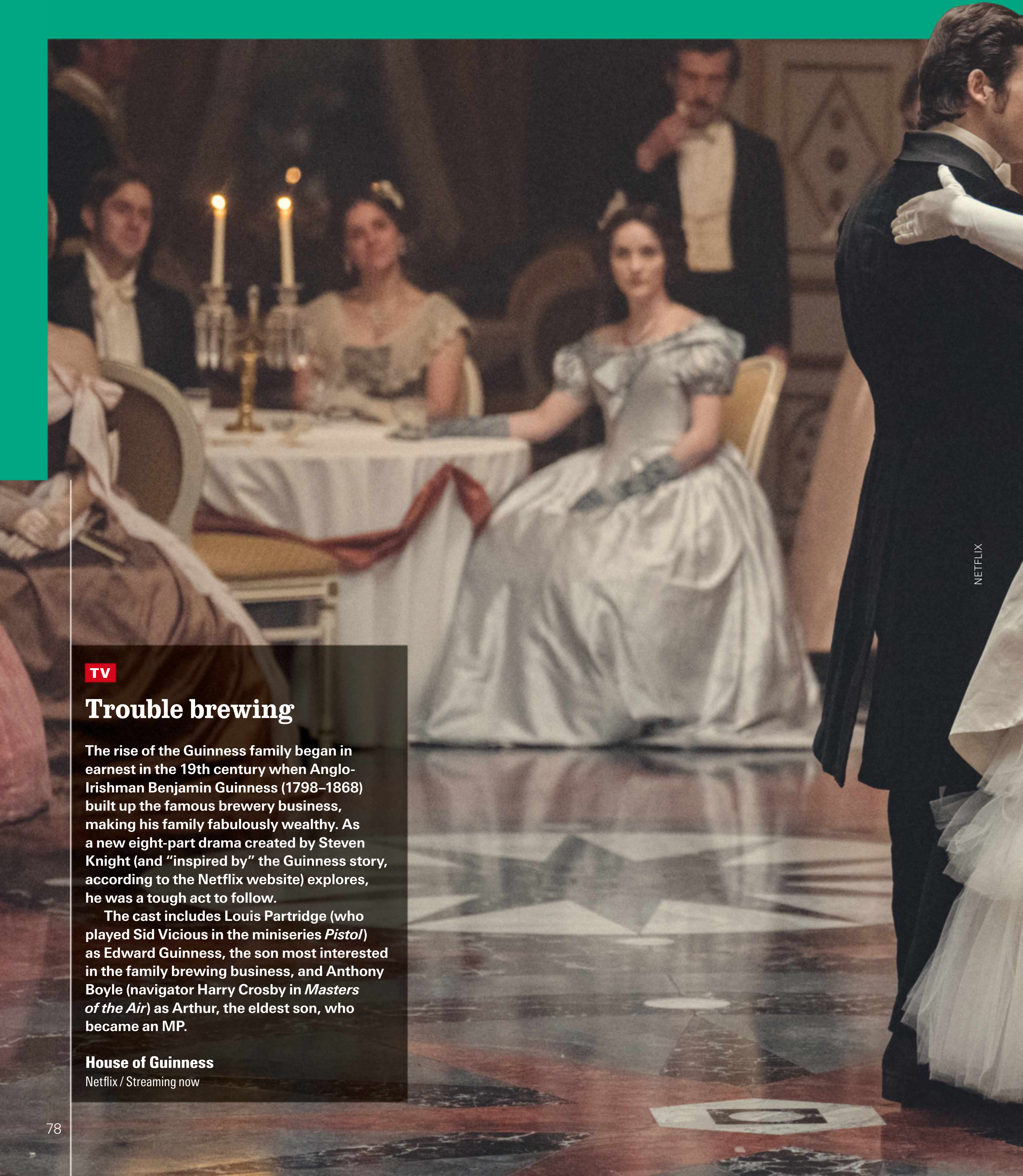

Tudor Life with Ruth Goodman
Royal residences: secrets and scandals, with Kate Williams

ENCOUNTERS

DIARY By **Jonathan Wright** and **Danny Bird**
HISTORY COOKBOOK **The first British curry**
EXPLORE **Wharram Percy, North Yorkshire**
CITIES **New York City, USA**



NETFLIX

TV

Trouble brewing

The rise of the Guinness family began in earnest in the 19th century when Anglo-Irishman Benjamin Guinness (1798–1868) built up the famous brewery business, making his family fabulously wealthy. As a new eight-part drama created by Steven Knight (and "inspired by" the Guinness story, according to the Netflix website) explores, he was a tough act to follow.

The cast includes Louis Partridge (who played Sid Vicious in the miniseries *Pistol*) as Edward Guinness, the son most interested in the family brewing business, and Anthony Boyle (navigator Harry Crosby in *Masters of the Air*) as Arthur, the eldest son, who became an MP.

House of Guinness
Netflix / Streaming now

A tempestuous era in the story of the Guinness brewing dynasty is explored in a new Netflix series starring Anthony Boyle as politically driven scion Arthur

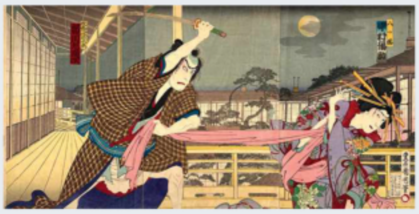
What's on this week?
Visit *historyextra.com* for updates on upcoming history TV and radio programmes

EXHIBITIONS

Eyewitness

Sainsbury Centre, Norwich / Until 15 February 2026 / *sainsburycentre.ac.uk*

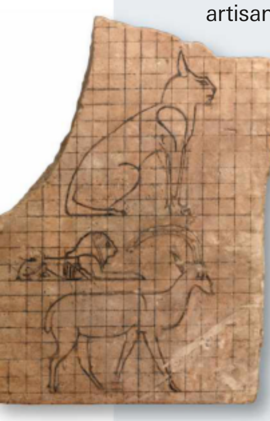
Shakespearean tragedy and Hitchcock's *Psycho* meet in a new exhibition that reveals how the spectacle of violence has shaped performance across centuries, from glove puppets to cutting-edge stagecraft. Through global works that confront homicide, morality and justice, *Eyewitness* invites its audience to question the impact of witnessing violence in culture and daily life. It's part of the Sainsbury Centre's multi-exhibition *Can We Stop Killing Each Other?* season.



A 19th-century Japanese woodblock print depicts a violent scene from a Kabuki drama

Made in Ancient Egypt

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge / 3 October 2025–12 April 2026 / *fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk*



Discover the ingenious methods, creative techniques and untold stories of the artisans whose legacy illuminates one of history's greatest civilisations. This exhibition showcases dazzling jewellery, sculpture and ceramics – many never before seen in the UK – alongside a rare 4,000-year-old handprint preserved on a tomb offering, and this guide for drawing animals produced on a limestone slab around 664–332 BC.

Cecil Beaton's Fashionable World

National Portrait Gallery, London / 9 October 2025–11 January 2026 / *npg.org.uk*

Cecil Beaton was a trailblazing photographer and costume designer whose dazzling images and outfits defined the fashions of an era. Blending Edwardian glamour with modern elegance, his artistry revolutionised fashion photography and saw him crowned the 'King of Vogue'. The NPG's new exhibition, which features some 250 images, sketches, letters and designs, traces Beaton's life and career from genteel Hampstead childhood to magazine commissions, Hollywood shoots and Oscar triumphs.

A new series finds Rob Brydon exploring the history of bluegrass and crafting a country hit with Gary Barlow

TV

Due South

According to Rob Brydon, he has "always loved country music but never really delved too deeply into it". Until now: in a three-part travelogue, the comedian and actor heads for the US. In the first episode, he arrives in Nashville, Tennessee, where he goes line dancing with British singer-songwriter Twinnie. He also heads for a studio to work on crafting a country hit with, of all people, Take That's Gary Barlow.

There's plenty of cultural history in the series, too, beginning with an exploration of the history of bluegrass that includes a visit to the Kentucky birthplace of Bill Monroe (1911–96), the mandolin player and singer-songwriter dubbed the 'Father of Bluegrass'.

Rob Brydon's Honky Tonk Road Trip

BBC Two / Starts Sunday 5 October

Humankind last walked on the moon more than half a century ago. A new BBC documentary asks if that might soon be repeated

TV

What lies ahead

We're witnessing the beginning of a new space race. What better time, then, to revisit the history of humankind's off-planet adventures, and to consider what may lie ahead. Directed by James Bluemel, who previously helmed *Once Upon a Time in Northern Ireland*, this four-part documentary promises archive footage alongside interviews with astronauts, engineers, scientists and billionaires.

It's now more than half a century since Apollo astronaut Gene Cernan – the 11th and, currently, most recent person to walk on the moon – stated: "We shall return." As nations around the world invest heavily in lunar exploration, could his words soon be proven prescient?

One Upon a Time in Space

BBC Two / Late October

COURTESY OF PAUL GRIFFITH COLLECTION/MUSÉE DU LOUVRE, DIST. GRANDPALAISRMN. PHOTO CHRISTIAN DÉCAMPS/BBC/DREAMSTIME

For her new series, Bettany Hughes experiences the sights, sounds and smells of a camel market in Oman

ALAMY

TV

Exploring the past

Back on her travels, Bettany Hughes returns with a new series of her *Treasures of the World*, in which she uses remarkable artefacts from the past as jumping off points for telling wider stories.

Highlights include a diving expedition off the coast of Croatia, where evidence of a Neolithic settlement lies beneath the waves. In Rhodes, she discovers a Greek island that, at different points, was a place where Roman elites relaxed and a fortified power base for the Knights of St John. We're also promised the polyphonic singing of Estonia's Seto people, plus visits to the Silk Road cities of Uzbekistan and the ancient camel markets of Oman.

Bettany Hughes' Treasures of the World
Channel 4 / October

Martin Scorsese is the subject of a new five-part series exploring an unrivalled career in film

TV

A life in cinema

Few filmmakers transcend their professional lives to become historically important figures. Fewer still have such a rich story to tell as Martin Scorsese, the director of *Taxi Driver*, *Raging Bull* and *Goodfellas*, among other acclaimed movies, and one of the major figures in the so-called New Hollywood era.

Now a five-part series directed by documentary maker and novelist Rebecca Miller, who was granted access to Scorsese's archives, explores how the director's life has shaped his career, beginning with the work he made as a film student in the 1960s. The roster of interviewees is a who's who of A-listers including Jodie Foster, Robert De Niro, Daniel Day-Lewis (Miller's husband), Cate Blanchett and Steven Spielberg.

Mr. Scorsese
Apple TV+ / Streaming from Friday 17 October

RADIO HIGHLIGHTS

The state of nations

It's 80 years since the Charter of the United Nations, signed in June 1945 as the Second World War reached its endgame in Asia, came into effect. Subsequently, an organisation designed to keep the peace and promote cooperation has sometimes been lauded for its efforts but has also been accused of proving unable to intervene because of political paralysis. With the emphasis on the role of emerging nations, its history is explored in **Archive on 4: War & Peace – The UN at 80** (BBC Radio 4, Saturday 11 October), presented by Thant Myint-U – grandson of U Thant, the first UN secretary-general to hail from the global south. The documentary also asks whether the UN can adapt to cope with what lies ahead in an age of climate change, among other endemic issues.

For **Archive on 4: One Last Chance to See** (BBC Radio 4, Saturday 4 October), author Katherine Rundell revisits a Radio 4 series (and book) made more than 35 years ago. Written and presented by Douglas Adams (of *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* fame) and conservationist Mark Carwardine, the series sought out endangered animals around the globe. Sadly, some might have subsequently gone extinct. Meanwhile, **Archive on 4: A People's History of Gaza** (BBC Radio 4, Saturday 18 October) tells the territory's story since the 1940s through the words of ordinary people.

The History Podcast: The House at Number 48 (BBC Radio 4 & BBC Sounds, Monday 13 October) could be one of the highlights of the autumn season. Over 10 episodes it tells the story of Antony Easton, an Englishman whose father kept his identity – a German Jew from a wealthy family that lost its fortune to the Nazis – a secret from his son.

Forthcoming episodes of *Witness History* (BBC World Service) include **The Chindits** (Sunday 5 October), focusing on the special forces who fought behind enemy lines against Japan; and **Wallander and the Rise of Nordic Noir**, in which Anneli Høier, who was author Henning Mankell's agent, reflects on how Scandinavia became a crime fiction powerhouse. H

Rolf Lassgård as fictional detective Kurt Wallander, discussed in a BBC World Service programme

Rylan Clark and Professor Alice Roberts investigate cases of Essex women who were killed after being accused of witchcraft

TV

Travesties of justice

Here's an unexpected pairing: broadcaster Rylan Clark and anthropologist Professor Alice Roberts team up to look back at one of the bleakest chapters in the history of Essex – the killing of hundreds of women who were accused of being witches.

Each episode in the three-part series focuses on a specific trial from the 16th or 17th century, with the duo treating what happened as cold cases. Who were these women, and how did so many come to be sentenced to death by hanging?

Helped by experts, Clark and Roberts consult original court documents, and visit the towns and villages where the women lived. H

Witches of Essex with Rylan and Prof Alice Roberts
Sky History / Tuesday 14 October

GAMES / Between the lines

JAMES OSBORNE joins the ranks of soldiers in the great armies of Europe during the tumult of the Napoleonic Wars

Holdfast: Nations at War
Anvil Games Studios / From £15.99

The Napoleonic Wars are often remembered in sweeping strokes: Napoleon's march across a continent, the smoke of Waterloo, the great manoeuvres of armies and empires. *Holdfast: Nations at War*, first released in 2020 and now newly re-released for consoles, strips away that panoramic view. In its place, this action-packed multiplayer shooter positions players directly in the ranks, musket in hand, drum on shoulder.

Rather than offering top-down strategy, this is a game of individual combatants meshed together, folded into the noise and confusion of early 19th-century warfare. Muskets misfire, reloading is slow and nerve-shredding, and volleys are effective only when delivered with discipline. Line infantry troops live and die by their formations; cavalry thunders into flanks; artillery crews scramble to load and fire before the enemy closes. Whatever historical accuracy the game does achieve lies much less in a meticulous portrait of events than in its creation of rich atmosphere.

With bright, polished visuals, it's also a game that looks very striking, albeit in an intensely chaotic way. Arguably, that chaos is where it succeeds best: when the battlefield is at its noisiest and most confused, the game is at its most enjoyable. It conjures a vision of war that feels lived-in: muddy, loud and dangerous.

For game-players drawn to this turbulent period of history, *Holdfast: Nations at War* offers not the grand sweep of Napoleonic strategy but an experience of moments at a human scale: the sensation of standing in line, musket raised towards a distant horizon, waiting for the order to fire. H

Holdfast: Nations at War sends players onto the front lines of combat during the conflicts that shook Europe at the turn of the 19th century

James Osborne is digital content producer for *HistoryExtra*

MGM/HANGAR

RECIPE

The first British curry

ELEANOR BARNETT prepares a dish with Indian influences that was designed to appeal to Georgian English tastes

With a richly spicy sauce but no chilli heat, this mild dish appealed to English palates – indeed, Queen Victoria came to enjoy a chicken curry weekly

The Indian takeaway is a ritual ingrained in British culture – so much so that chicken tikka masala is widely considered the national dish of the UK. Like much in food history, though, that recipe's origins are hotly debated. The Pakistani-Scottish chef Ali Ahmed Aslam claimed to have invented it in the 1970s when he added a tomato-and-cream sauce of gravy consistency to chicken tikka in order to please the palates of his Glaswegian customers. Whatever the truth, it is certainly not an Indian dish but something unique arising from the blending of Indian and British cuisines.

The British have been making 'curries' inspired by Indian dishes since as far back as the 17th century, when the East India Company began establishing trading posts across the subcontinent. No dish called 'curry' actually existed in India, but Company men returning home and experimenting with flavours to remind them of their travels likely coined the term based on the Tamil word *kari*, which simply means 'sauce'. The British in India merged elements of a host of different local cuisines, picking and choosing exotic ingredients and pairing them with familiar techniques and flavours.

In the mid-18th century, when Bengal came under British rule, recipes for 'Indian' foods began to appear in English cookery books. Then, in 1810, a British-Indian former soldier named Sake Dean Mahomed opened the first Indian restaurant in London – the Hindoostane Coffee House, which served curries alongside hookah.

In 1877, Queen Victoria was declared Empress of India after the crown had taken over control of territories on the subcontinent as part of its expanding empire. By then, Anglo-Indian curries were common components of British diets across the class spectrum. Victoria ate a version of chicken curry weekly, and employed several Indian servants and a cook.

So what did these early Anglo-Indian curries taste like? The first printed British recipe for curry appeared in 1747 in Hannah Glasse's *The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy*. Here I've adapted her slightly later version, from 1755. It lacks much of the spicy heat that we tend to associate with Indian food – making use only of ginger, pepper, and turmeric – and the sauce to accompany the stewed meat is much thinner than we are used to. But it is a flavourful and creamy dish, cooked in melted butter and served with fluffy rice, that will still please the whole family today.

NDIAN RESTAURANT

A London Indian restaurant in 1947, two centuries after the first Anglo-Indian curry recipe appeared

TOPFOTO/ELEANOR BARNETT

Serves: 4
Difficulty: 2/10
Time taken: 45 mins

INGREDIENTS

4 chicken breasts
500ml water
2 onions
30g butter
1 tsp turmeric
1½ tsp ground ginger
1½ tsp ground pepper
Salt to taste
70ml double cream
Juice of 1 lemon
300g rice

METHOD

1. Stew the chicken in the water for 5 minutes, then strain off the liquor and set aside for use later.

2. Chop the onions and fry them in the butter until softened.

3. Chop up the chicken and add it to the pan, frying it with the onions until browned.

4. Add the spices and a little salt, then pour in the reserved chicken liquor. Leave it to stew for half an hour.

5. Meanwhile, cook the rice according to the instructions on the packet.

6. Remove the curry from the heat and add the cream and lemon juice.

7. Serve with the cooked rice.

Eleanor Barnett is a food historian at Cardiff University. She is the author of *Leftovers: A History of Food Waste and Preservation* (Apollo, 2024), and posts @Historyeats on Instagram

Of ruins and revenants

Across Britain, hundreds of once-thriving medieval settlements were abandoned for reasons ranging from disease to economic collapse. **CONNIE ROUT** visits one of the country's most atmospheric 'lost villages'

Wharram Percy is one of the best-preserved of Britain's deserted settlements – yet, even after decades of academic study, it still feels like a hidden secret. First you must descend an ancient track deep within the Yorkshire Wolds; only then can you find the medieval road leading to the heart of this long-abandoned village. Today, a tumbledown church dating from the 12th century is the last standing structure of medieval origin. Cows graze where peasant longhouses once stood, and the waters of a shimmering millpond are ruffled only by damselflies and birds.

At the turn of the 14th century, though, Wharram Percy was home to around 200 residents. Follow a path between its earthwork remains and you can imagine how it might once have looked at its peak, under the governance of the influential Percy family. Interpretative boards dotted around the site show how its layout and buildings changed over the centuries.

It's not just an atmospheric spot for a ramble. Wharram Percy's legacy is the rich picture of medieval village life that it has provided thanks to the Wharram Research Project, launched in 1948. Over the following decades, annual excavations uncovered extensive material culture and more than 600 human skeletons. Through the project, which ran until 2012, these extraordinary finds have shaped our understanding of the lives of English peasants in the Middle Ages.

In the 1960s, archaeologists discovered a pit of skeletal remains that spoke of a darker past. Some 137 bones were unearthed, belonging to at least 10 individuals who lived between the 11th and 14th centuries. These bones display evidence of decapitation, dismemberment and burning, likely inflicted shortly after death.

A prominent theory suggests that these demonstrate a belief in revenants – the living dead. Accounts from across medieval Europe speak of discontented souls rising from their graves, spreading disease and plaguing the living. According to these texts, communities could rid themselves of an irksome revenant by digging up the corpse and destroying it. Are the mutilated Wharram Percy skeletons suggestive of villagers attempting to rid themselves of the 'living dead'? If so, it would make this the only site in the UK where such evidence of the practice has been found.

Unruly corpses weren't, though, responsible for the ultimate demise of the settlement, which was abandoned by the early 17th century. Its fortunes had suffered over the course of the 14th century, hit first by raiding Scots and then by the Black Death, but the final nail in the coffin came with the rise of sheep farming.

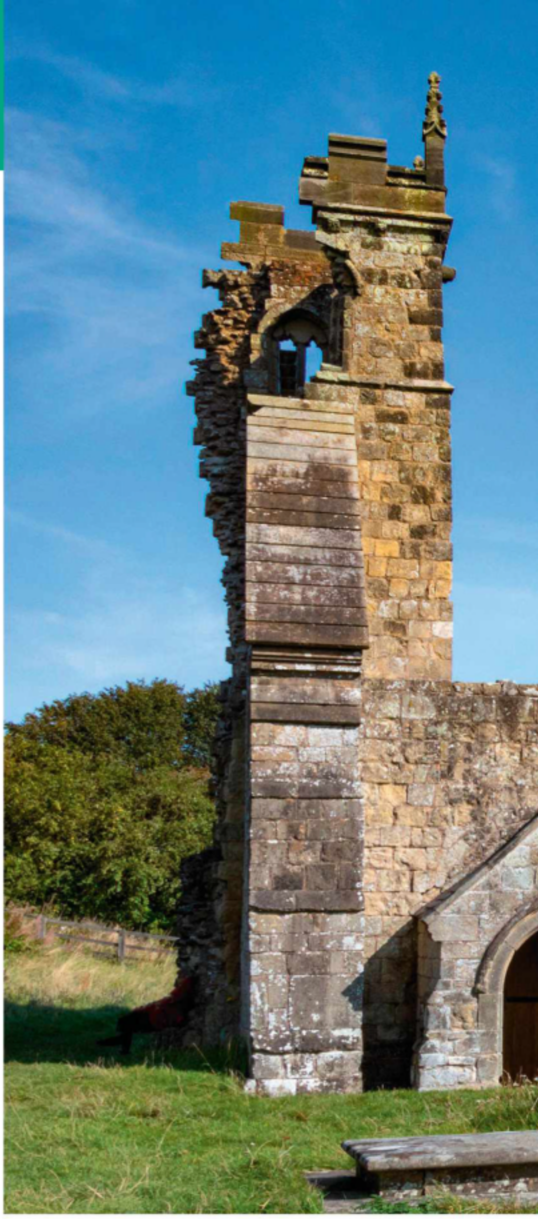
Wharram Percy's peasantry had long cultivated arable land around the village. However, as the demand for (and price of) English wool grew, landowners replaced crops with sheep. Villagers were moved out in numbers from the late 1450s; then, around 1500, four families were evicted from the settlement and their houses destroyed, leaving only shepherds and smallholders.

To get a real feel for the landscape around Wharram Percy, visit the site as part of a circular walk through the Yorkshire Wolds – noting that much of the countryside in the area has now been converted back to arable farmland. Perhaps stop for lunch in the historic market town of Malton and, if you can't get enough of medieval ruins, call in at nearby Kirkham Priory. All contribute to a sense of the history of this beautiful area.

"Some 137 bones unearthed here display evidence of decapitation, dismemberment and burning, likely inflicted after death"

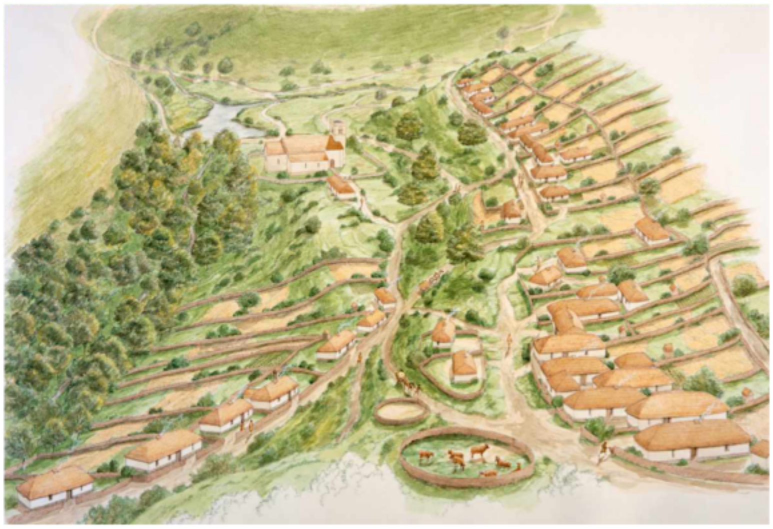
Connie Rout is a Yorkshire-based writer specialising in heritage, travel and tourism

For more information, head to **english-heritage.org.uk**



Excavations at St Martin's revealed that it was built on the site of two earlier churches from the 10th and 11th centuries

The remains of St Martin's Church, built from the 12th century, comprise the only medieval structure still standing at Wharram Percy



An artist's impression of Wharram Percy in the 13th century depicts rows of 'tofts' (plots for peasant houses), each with an adjacent 'croft' (strip of land) used for growing food

The footprint of the 18th-century vicarage – Wharram Percy's fourth – can be seen in front of St Martin's church

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

New York City in five places

The Big Apple's story features chapters of conflict, competition, immigration and social revolution. **KARA SCHLICHTING** reveals the importance of five key sites

① Doyers Street

Immigration nation

The street layout of New York is largely rectangular and geometric, but Chinatown's Doyers Street is a throwback to the pre-grid-system city. Running one block, it's a narrow, kinked street with a sharp bend in the middle, and it opens a window onto immigrant life.

The street was named for a Dutchman, Hendrik Doyer, who operated a tavern and a distillery here in the 18th century. Later, Irish immigrants arrived and, over time, Doyers Street became lined with tenement houses – the city's prototypical apartment buildings that housed its rapidly swelling immigrant population.

The first Chinese arrived in New York in the early 1780s. Later, spurred by anti-Chinese sentiment and violence in the US West after the completion of the transcontinental railroad, the number of Chinese people in the city swelled rapidly from 200 to around 2,000 in the 1870s. Chinatown grew to encompass not just Doyers, but surrounding Mott, Pell and Canal Streets.

This little alley reflects waves of immigration that have made and remade the city. It's a wonderfully atmospheric place – and every visitor should try dim sum at Nom Wah Tea Parlor, dating back to the 1920s.

1
新香港男女理髮廳
NEW HONG KONG BARBER SHOP
香港男女理髮廳

A haven for immigrants since the 18th century, Doyers Street is a thriving artery in Chinatown

② Fulton Ferry Landing

Connecting communities

This pier on the Brooklyn shore illustrates how water shaped the city's economic life and expansion. The name Fulton recurs here. While Fulton Street runs down to the shore of the East River in Manhattan, Old Fulton Street runs south-east from the riverbank in Brooklyn. Between them chugged the ferry service established in 1814 by Robert Fulton, who developed the world's first commercially successful steamboat.

The new service revolutionised transportation between Brooklyn and Manhattan, crossing the river in less than 10 minutes – faster than earlier boats powered by sail (and even one with a horse on a little treadmill). Suddenly, travelling to work in the city from Long Island became not just feasible but quick and easy, and Brooklyn Heights became the first commuter suburb.

Walt Whitman wrote an ode to *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry*, lines from which are now inscribed in the metal railing at Fulton Ferry Landing – the wooden pier directly under the Brooklyn Bridge where Old Fulton Street meets the river today.

③ Stonewall Inn

Source of Pride

In the 1960s, Greenwich Village was a nexus of activism, and the Stonewall Inn on Christopher Street played a key role. In the early morning of 28 June 1969, police raided this dancing bar that was popular with gay men, lesbians and trans women. Bar owners often paid off police officers in return for advance warnings of raids, and any customers detained usually faced minimal repercussions. But the raid on the Stonewall Inn seemed unlike the usual affairs, threatening many arrests – and people started to fight back. Outside the bar, a growing crowd chanted, "Gay power! Liberate Christopher Street!" Protests against the police's actions were repeated over the following nights.

This episode was a key moment in the development of America's gay liberation movement. A year later, in June 1970, the city hosted its first Pride March, led and organised by the Christopher Street Liberation Day Committee, to commemorate the rebellion.

Boats chugging from Fulton Ferry Landing have linked Brooklyn with Manhattan since 1814

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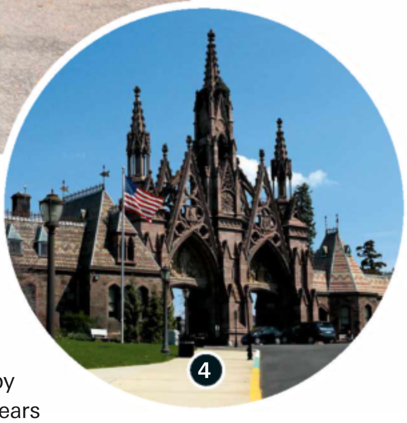


Green-Wood Cemetery is the resting place of figures such as Jean-Michel Basquiat and Leonard Bernstein

④ Green-Wood Cemetery
Remarkable resting place

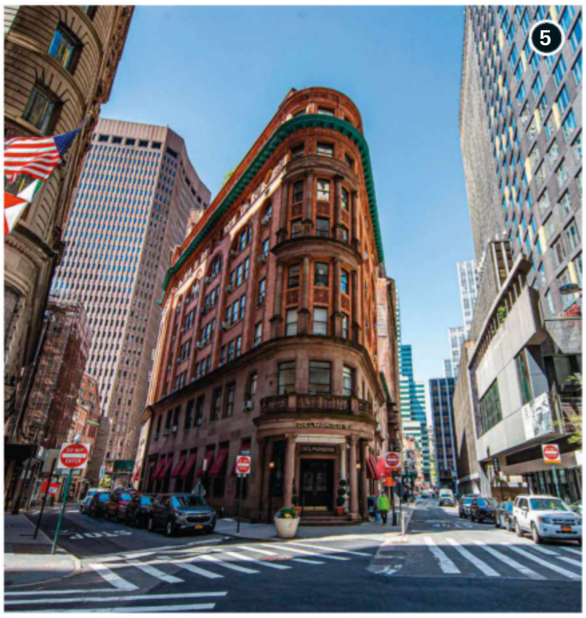
This verdant expanse sprawls across a mound of terminal moraine deposited by the Wisconsin ice sheet some 20,000 years ago – truly ancient history. Within rises the highest point in Brooklyn, Battle Hill. Here, during the battle of Brooklyn on 27 August 1776, the patriots suffered the biggest defeat of the war against the British.

At that time this was a rural agricultural community, but in 1838 Green-Wood Cemetery was founded, rapidly becoming renowned for its beauty. Within a few years it was the second-most-popular tourist destination in the US, just behind Niagara Falls, helping inspire the push for public green spaces such as Central Park.

Many famous people are buried here, including composer Leonard Bernstein, Lewis Comfort Tiffany – renowned for his art-nouveau stained glass – and Jean-Michel Basquiat, enfant terrible of the 1980s art scene.

Raising the bar together
The Stonewall Inn
3

Following a 1969 police raid, the Stonewall Inn became a rallying point for the gay rights movement



Beaver Street, named for the furs traded by Dutch settlers, transects Broad Street, the city's historic financial hub

⑤ Broad Street
Canals and capitalism

A stroll along just two blocks of Broad Street, at the far southern tip of Lower Manhattan, takes us through 400 years of history, from the earliest days of the settlement to its modern commercial heart. This thoroughfare follows the course of the Heere Gracht (Lord's Canal), built in the mid-17th century when New Amsterdam was a growing Dutch settlement.

Start at Beaver Street, named for the most important North American commodity traded by the Dutch – beaver fur. Walk north to Exchange Place and look for the little buttonwood tree that commemorates the signing of the Buttonwood Agreement in 1792 establishing the New York Stock Exchange. One block north is Wall Street, bookending four centuries of capitalism. H

Kara Schlichting is an associate professor of history at Queens College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, and author of *New York Recentered* (University of Chicago Press, 2019). She was speaking to travel writer Paul Bloomfield

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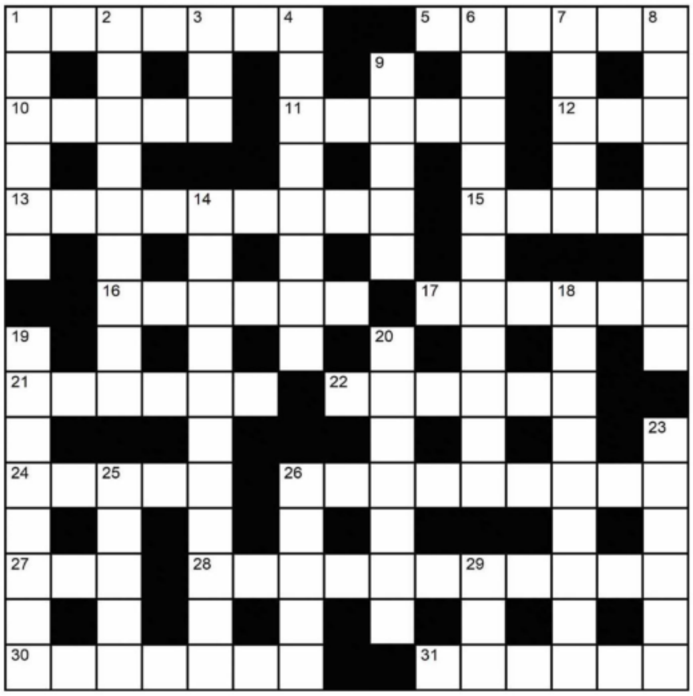
PRIZE CROSSWORD



Across

1 Wilson's government tried to stop publication of those of ex-minister Richard Crossman in the early 1970s (7)

5 The content of Lucrezia Borgia's hollow ring, according to unsubstantiated rumours (6)

10 Kwame Nkrumah was its first prime minister and, later, president (5)

11 English scholar who, in 1852, published what has become a standard language reference work (5)

12 John ____, "Scotland's most infamous pirate", subject of a book by Daniel Defoe (3)

13 Third wife of the Roman emperor Claudius, executed after an apparent attempt to seize power in Rome (9)

15/1 down Portuguese navigator who led an expedition around the Cape of Good Hope in 1497 (5,2,4)

16 Peninsula that was ceded to Yugoslavia after the Second World War (6)

17 US artist who made his name in 1962 with paintings of Campbell's soup cans (6)

21 ____ the Great, emperor of the Maurya empire, India, died c232 BC (6)

22 Gas discovered in August 1868 by a French astronomer observing a total eclipse (6)

24 John ____, a navigator who, on a 1497 voyage, mistook Newfoundland (named by him) for north-east Asia (5)

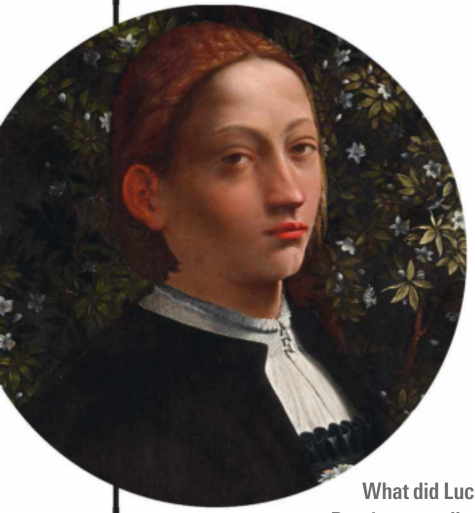
26 Dictator of North Korea until his death in 1994 (3,2-4)

27 ____ of Bayeux, bishop believed to have commissioned the famed Tapestry (3)

28 Lying off New York City, it became the main reception centre for immigrants to the US (5,6)

30 Cosimo I de' Medici became the first grand duke of this region in 1569 (7)

31 John ____, Scottish mathematician who originated the system of logarithms in the 16th and 17th centuries (6)



What did Lucrezia Borgia reputedly keep in her hollow ring? *(5 across)*

Down

1 See 15 across

2 18th-century Scottish political economist, author of *The Wealth of Nations* (4,5)

3 Organisation founded in 1919 that succeeded the Irish Volunteers (3)

4 Mediterranean island that became Austrian territory in 1708, as affirmed by the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht (8)

6 Co-founder of the National Trust in 1895 (7,4)

7 Icelandic prose narratives about legendary and historical heroes (5)

8 Term for the Americas, possibly first used (in Latin) by Amerigo Vespucci (3,5)

9 Ancient alphabetic script used in Irish and Pictish inscriptions on stone monuments (5)

14 ____ mechanism, an ancient Greek 'computer' recovered in 1901 from a wreck (11)

18 Sixth ruler of Babylon's first dynasty, celebrated for his code of laws (9)

19 George ____ (1800–91), often referred to as the 'Father of American History' (8)

20 A famous open-air museum of County Durham that includes a 1900s pit village (7)

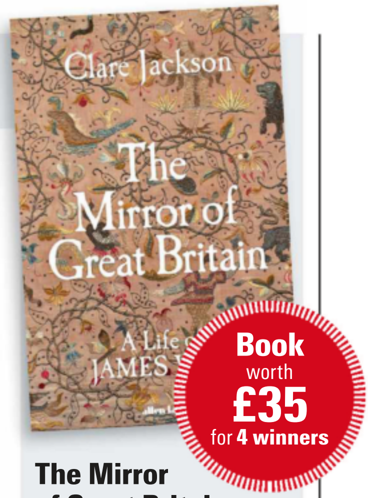
23 Moroccan city completely rebuilt after being destroyed by two earthquakes in 1960 (6)

25 Major company founded in 1849 as a herbal medicine shop in Nottingham (5)

26 Surname of the Australian bushranger and notorious outlaw whose legendary status still persists (5)

29 Jamaican pop music precursor of reggae in the early 1960s, revived in the UK in the late 1970s (3)

Compiled by **Eddie James**



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A Life of James VI & I
By Clare Jackson

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HOW TO ENTER

● Open to residents of the UK (& Channel Islands). Post entries to ***BBC History Magazine*, November 2025 Crossword, PO Box 501, Leicester, LE94 0AA** or email them to ***November2025@historycomps.co.uk*** by 5pm on 29 October 2025. ● Entrants must supply full name, address and phone number. The winners will be the first correct entries drawn at random after the closing time. Winners' names will appear in the Christmas 2025 issue. By entering, participants agree to be bound by the terms and conditions shown in full in the box below. Immediate Media Company Ltd (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) will use personal details in accordance with the Immediate Privacy Policy at *https://policies.immediate.co.uk/privacy* ● Immediate Media Company Ltd (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) would love to send you newsletters, together with special offers and other promotions. If you would not like to receive these, please write 'NO INFO' on your entry. ● Branded BBC titles are licensed from or published jointly with BBC Studios (the commercial arm of the BBC). Please tick here ☐ if you'd like to receive regular newsletters, special offers and promotions from BBC Studios by email. Your information will be handled in accordance with the BBC Studios privacy policy: *bbcstudios.com/privacy. – bbc.com/editorialguidelines/guidance/code-of-conduct*

Solution to our September 2025 crossword

Across 1 Cleves 4 Gracchus 10 Greenwich 11 Locum 12 Alfonso 14 Rainier 15 Bailiff 17 Shiite 21 Lutine 22 Diarchy 25 Cambrai 27 Hostage 29 Arsuf 30 Euripides 32 Eva Peron 33 Bounty
Down 1 Coggan 2/18 Eye of Horus 3 Eon 5 Rahere 6 Calvi 7 Ho Chi Minh 8 Somerset 9 Ridolfi 13 Nolan 16 Artemesia 19 Blockade 20 Wishart 23 Cicero 24 Nevsky 26 Rifle 28 Aidan 31 Plo

Four winners of *What to Expect When You're Dead*:
Sarah Shurman, Leominster; G Derbyshire, Keighley;
Peter Byatt, Lowestoft; Christine Greenwood, Rochdale

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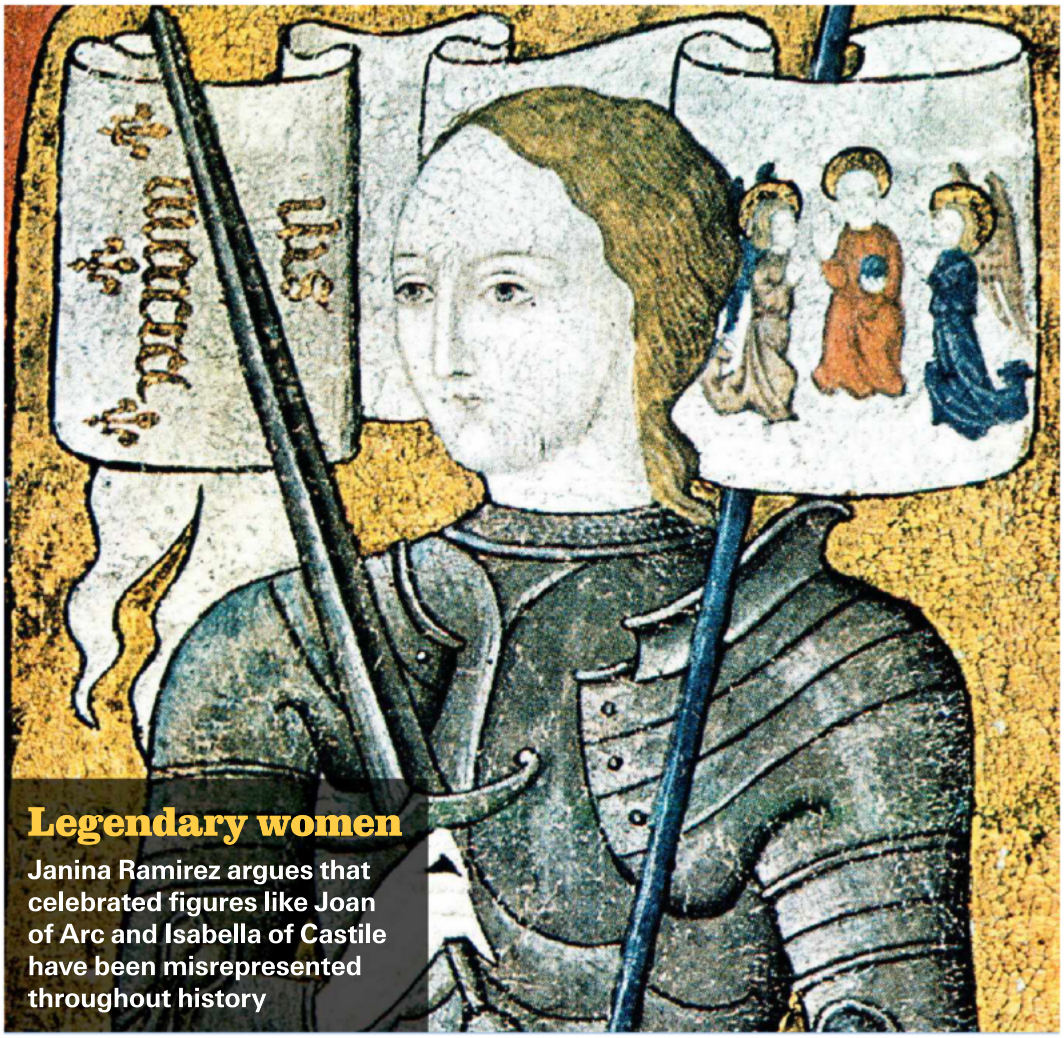
December issue on sale 30 October 2025

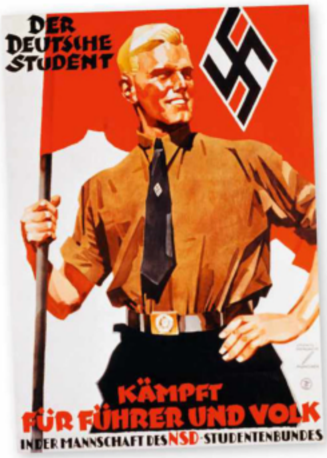


Legendary women

Janina Ramirez argues that celebrated figures like Joan of Arc and Isabella of Castile have been misrepresented throughout history

Dictator to democracy

Paul Preston reveals how Spain moved on from Franco's authoritarian regime


DER DEUTSCHE STUDENT
KÄMPFT FÜR FÜHRER UND VOLK
IN DER MANNSCHAFT DES NSD-STUDENTENBUNDES

Nazi propaganda

Lisa Pine examines how the Third Reich used posters to reinforce both its policies and its rule

An absent mother?

Lauren Johnson revisits the relationship between Margaret Beaufort and the future Henry VII

Young Caesar

David Potter contends that we need to take a fresh look at the Roman leader's early life

The surprising Tudors

Ruth Goodman shares five things you probably didn't know about the 16th century

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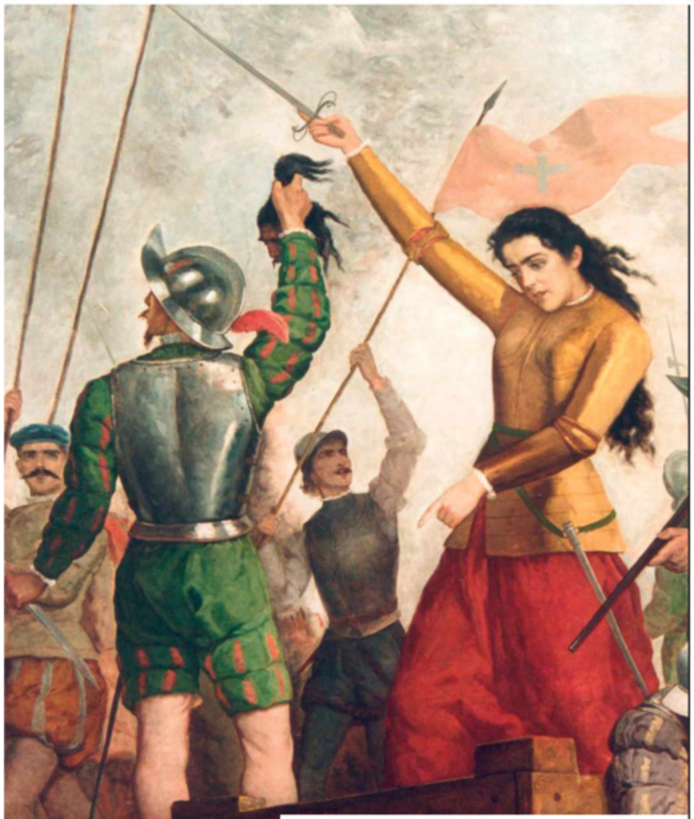
MY HISTORY HERO

*Novelist **Isabel Allende** chooses*

Inés Suárez

c1507–80

Isabel Allende is a Chilean-American author whose books have sold 88 million copies worldwide. Her latest novel is *My Name is Emilia del Valle* (Bloomsbury, 2025)



A 19th-century painting of Inés Suárez defending Santiago against attack by Mapuche people in 1541. "I can't help but admire her strength," says Isabel Allende

IN PROFILE

Born in Spain, Inés Suárez participated in the conquest of Chile with her lover, Pedro de Valdivia, and defended the new settlement they founded, Santiago, from an attack by the Indigenous Mapuche people. She subsequently became a symbol of the Chilean woman standing up to authority, and has been immortalised in historical novels including Allende's *Inés of My Soul* (2006), inspiration for the Spanish-Chilean television drama of the same name.

> " She defied everyone and did things her way, challenging the church and the world. She was unstoppable, and I love that "

When did you first hear about Suárez? When I was studying Chilean history – though she is hardly mentioned in most Chilean history books, despite being the only Spanish woman to accompany 110 Conquistadors to what was then considered the end of the world. There is no monument erected in her memory.

What kind of woman was she? She came from a humble family in Spain, and was originally a seamstress. Her hair was described as "flaming", and she never had children. Interestingly, there's no record of her suffering any accident or illness, so she must have been incredibly strong. She also had the gift of finding water, and helped save the Conquistador army when crossing the Atacama Desert.

While the other Spaniards were fighting, looking for gold and raping Indigenous women, she was collecting chickens and cows, and buying land. She became the second-richest person in the country, the envy of the Conquistador captains. Unlike those men, who all died in their thirties or forties, she lived to her seventies.

What made her a hero? She defied everyone and did things her way, challenging the church and the world. She was unstoppable, and I love that. Women were not allowed to accompany Conquistadors unless joining a husband – and only with the permission of the king and the church. The Conquistador men didn't feel that they needed their wives, because they were raping Indigenous women. In contrast, Inés went to Chile for love, not in search of gold or glory.

What was her finest hour? Saving Santiago – today the national capital, but then just a bunch of shacks – from an attack by 10,000 Indigenous Mapuche people. Inés took charge of the defence, and the battle was brutal. Mapuche chieftains were taken prisoner – and she had them decapitated, then threw the heads over the city defences, persuading their people to back away. The fact that a woman could do such a thing is shocking to us now, but I can't help but admire her strength. She was also capable of showing great compassion, though.

Is there anything that you don't particularly admire about her? She enslaved Indigenous people, which I find horrifying – but you can't judge her by the standards of today.

Can you see any parallels between her life and your own? Not really. I'm a passionate woman, and my protagonists are strong women, but I never fought off 10,000 attackers!

What would you ask Inés Suárez if you could meet her now? I'd like to have met her when she was an old woman, and asked her if she had had a happy life. H

Isabel Allende was talking to York Membery

In the BBC Radio 4 series **Great Lives**, guests discuss inspirational figures: *bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qxsb*

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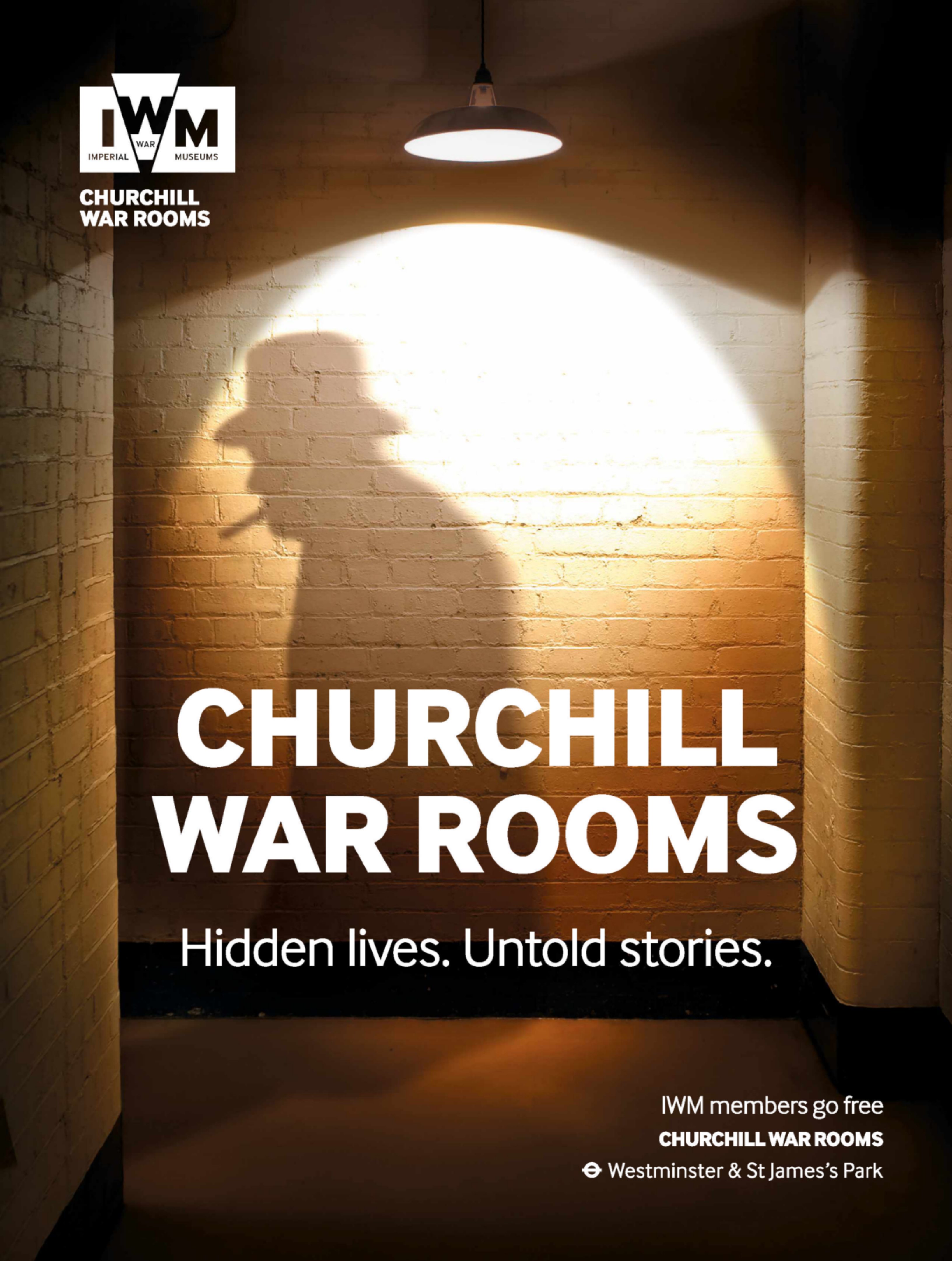

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